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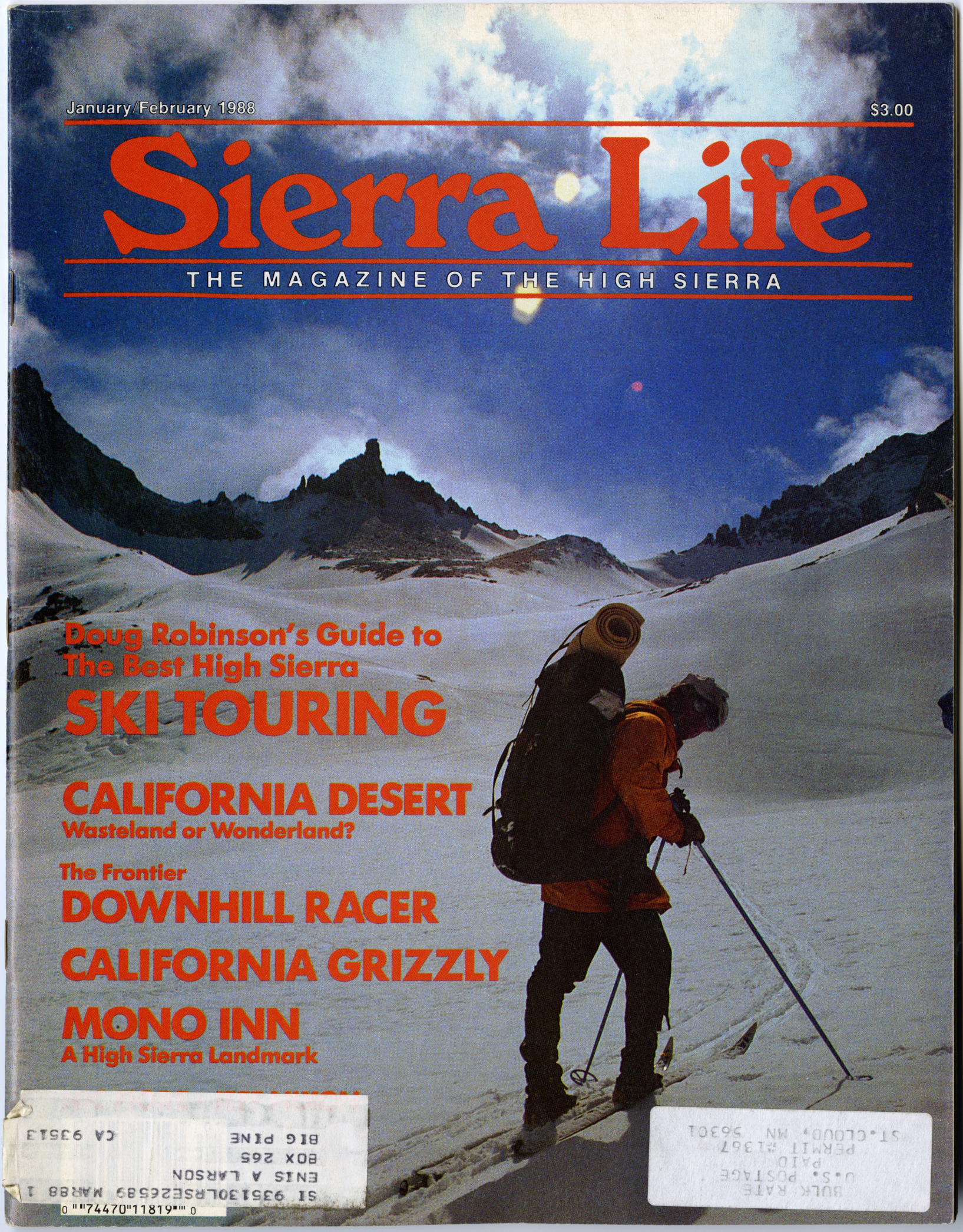
Sierra Life

THE MAGAZINE OF THE HIGH SIERRA



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Will Hearst, publisher, descends the Mist Trail past Vernal Falls into Yosemite Valley *Doug Robinson Photo*

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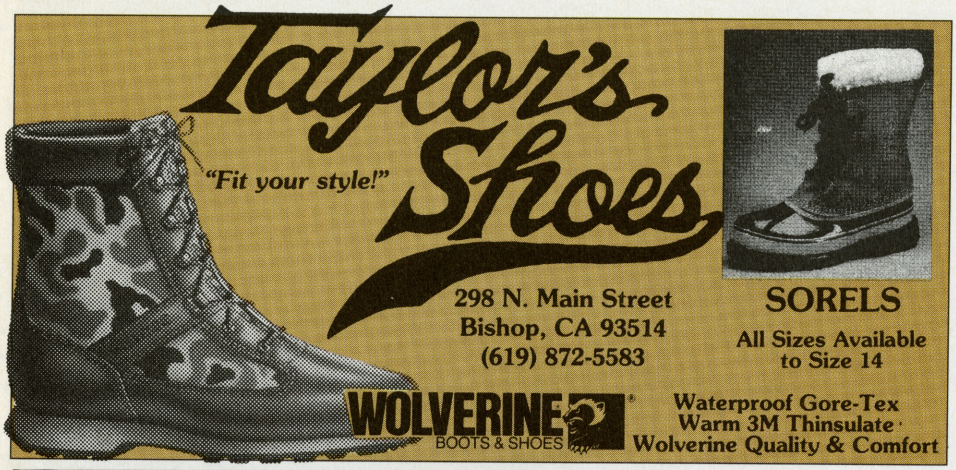

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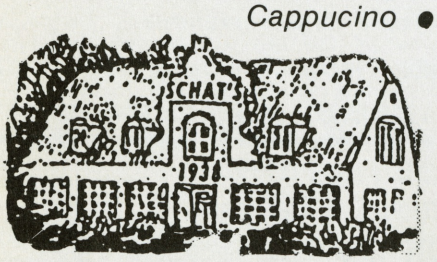

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LETTERS

Editor's Note: We recently sent a survey to all our subscribers in order to find out what you like best about Sierra Life *and what you would like to see changed or added. The response was overwhelming and we would like to thank all of you who took the time to fill out the forms. We'd also like to share with you a few of the comments we received.*

Please don't "sell out" your quality. I agree with other readers—compared to other outdoor mags, yours is unique and excellent quality in every way.

— Riverside

I think your magazine does what it does very well. Keep up the good work.

— San Clemente

Your magazine is *always* worth the wait! Please keep it Real (not glossy) and "Local."

— West Covina

I get tired of reading about LADWP as the "Evil People" and would sometime like a feature about the good they do.

— Bishop

My property is in Mariposa County, so I would like more articles on the Western Sierra as well as the Bishop area, which we also love!

— Bethesda, Maryland

We have business interest in Owens Valley and enjoy the articles about local people and their lifestyle in Eastern Sierra.

— Bakersfield

Great magazine — but don't forget the Northern Sierra.

— Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Love your magazine. I have saved all your issues. They are special! How about more articles about hiking groups for older people?

— San Juan Capistrano

More, much more on the plants of the Sierra and deserts!

— Los Angeles

You and your staff keep up the good work! Living at the ocean, it's great to get your magazine.

— San Pedro

FROM THE PUBLISHER

Writing this column introducing each issue is usually one of the things I enjoy most about publishing *Sierra Life*. Today, it is one of the hardest things I've ever had to do. Just as we were going to press, we received word that David Gaines— a personal friend as well as the man who has almost single-handedly been responsible for the continuing survival of Mono Lake—had been killed in an automobile accident near Mammoth Lakes.

David, who was only 40 when an oncoming truck ended his life in the wind-swept snow, founded the Mono Lake Committee 10 years ago to oppose continued water diversion by Los Angeles.

David died as he had lived, working to protect the 500,000-year-old lake. He was returning to Lee Vining from Bishop with his wife Sally, two children, and Don Oberlin, a committee intern, when the accident happened. They had been working on the Mono Lake Committee's newsletter.

David's efforts in organizing the Mono Lake Committee in February of 1978 and working on its behalf were instrumental in, among other things, gaining a congressional action to create a National Forest Scenic Area protecting land near the lake and Bureau of Land Management designation of the area as a region of critical environmental concern.

We will all miss David and his ceaseless efforts on behalf of our precious environment. Our love and best wishes go to the members of his family and to those who will be carrying on with his good works.

Look for a proper tribute to David in our next issue

Sandie Pramann
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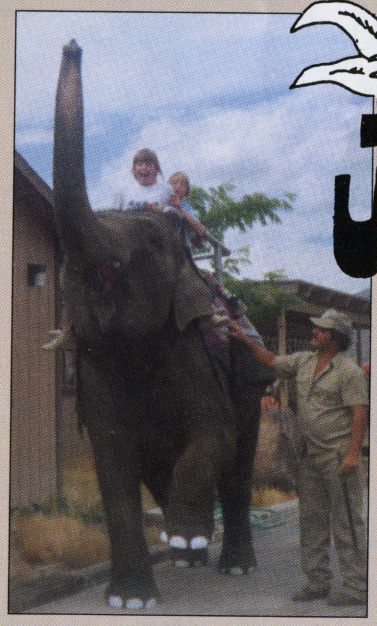
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OUR COVER: A.P. Marston of Lake Tahoe skies toward Milestone Mountain along the Sierra High Route. Photo by Doug Robinson of Bishop, California.

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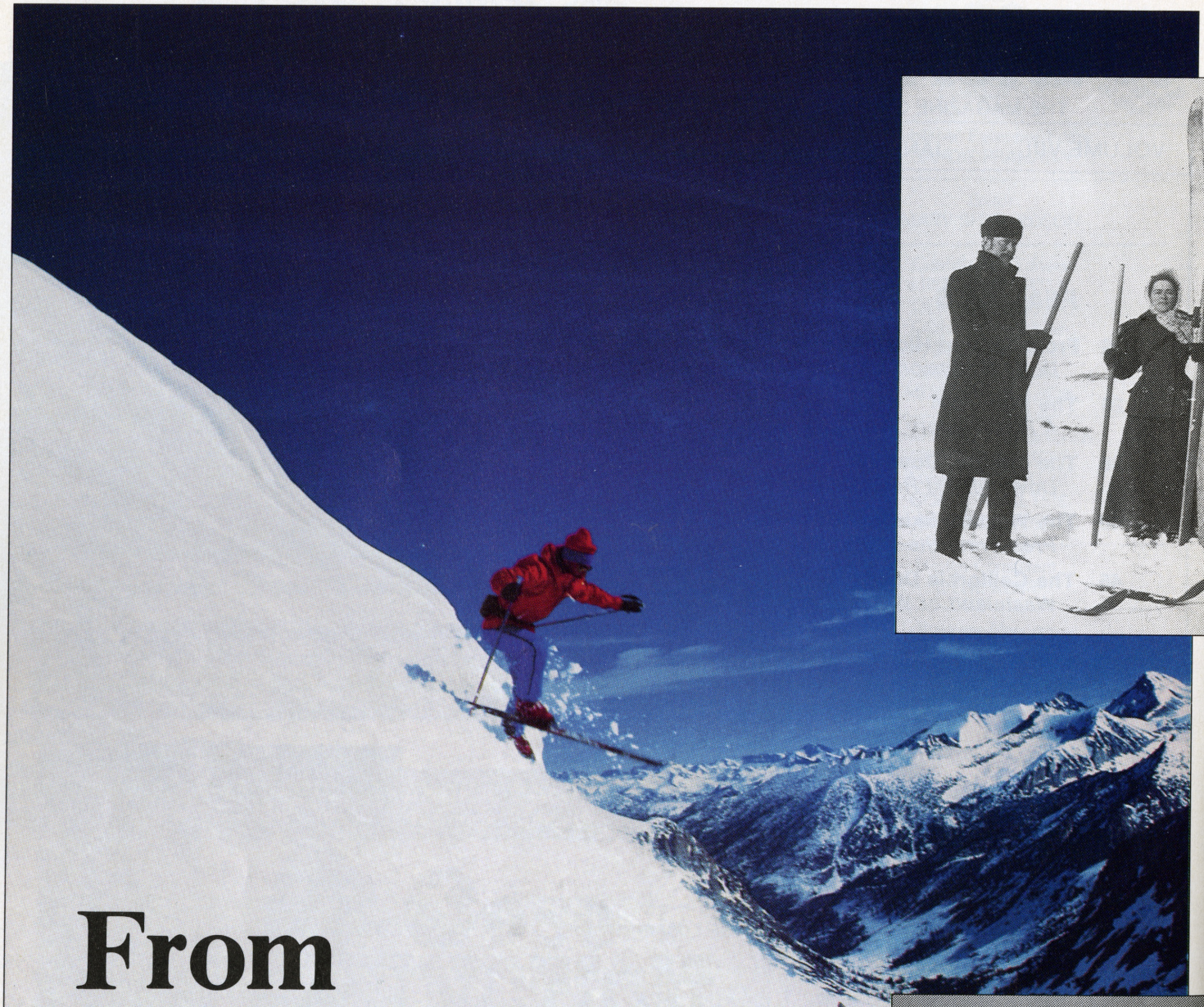
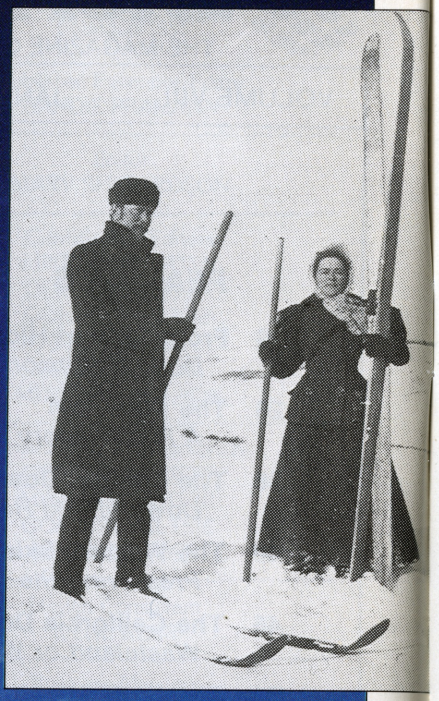
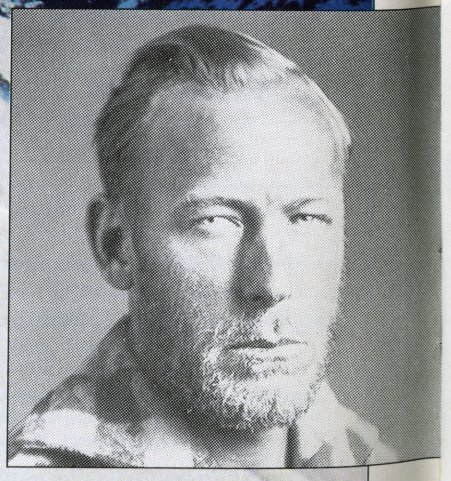






From Slats of Hickory to Wings of Glass

The Sierra's Top Touring Trails

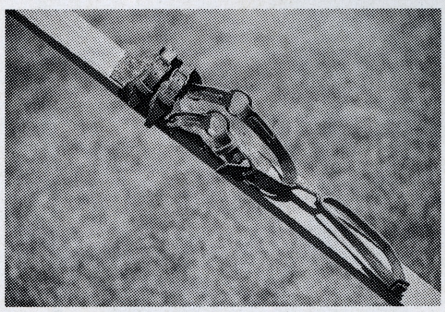
Text and Photos by Doug Robinson

Orland Bartholomew was one of California's pioneering ski mountaineers and, in the autumn of 1928, he was on the verge of his greatest adventure. He and a friend had spent the summer leading a pack horse up one dusty Sierra pass after another, spot-packing eleven food caches along the backbone of California — the High Sierra, which remains today, the largest high mountain wilderness in the 48 contiguous states.

Everything looked good for their planned ski adventure — until a promise of support from the San Joaquin Travel and Tourist Association down in Fresno was withdrawn. Without their financial backing, Bartholomew's partner could not afford to make the trip and had to drop out.

Thus, Orland Bartholomew set out alone into the Sierra that Christmas Eve, to spend nearly three months making the first ski traverse of the John Muir Trail, along 250 miles of the High Sierra Crest.

And why had the Association reneged on their promised support? They were reluctant, it seems — in an era of promoting California as all Hollywood and orange groves — to admit that it ever snowed, anywhere, in the Golden State. Perhaps they were still shivering from the memory of the winter 21 years before. It was in 1906-07 that seventy-three and one-half feet of snow fell on the gold rush town of Tamarack, just up the San Joaquin Valley from Fresno and a little way up into the Sierra. A pile of snow like that is hard to ignore — or to top!



Above: Early hickory ski and binding. Left: "Fast Eddie" Avadekian on the high route. Top left: Early Sierra Ski Touring. Bottom Left:Orland Bartholomew.

Four years ago at my local downhill ski area, Mammoth Mountain, I could walk right off the third story sundeck onto the snow. Mammoth recorded over 800 inches that winter, and skiing lasted into August. The snowpack at Tamarack seventy-five years earlier would have stood head and shoulders above even *that*.

The "secret" of snow blanketing the roof of California has pretty well been out since the Winter Olympics came to Squaw Valley in 1960. The state's downhill areas number in the dozens — among them are some of the largest in the world. The snow is also some of the friendliest anywhere, with occaional shirtsleeves skiing in February and bikinis seen on the slopes in April. And then there is cross-country skiing.

The elegant glide of nordic skis is certainly the least pedestrian means of foot travel, and by now the joys of cross-country skiing hardly needs any introduction. Back in the lowlands, though, we too easily forget the immediacy of that space and silence, the cold thin air, the exercise that's as good for the upper body as it is gentle on pavement-weary knees, and the spreading invitation of snow-covered mountains.

That snowy wilderness is much easier to get to today than it was for Bartholomew, and the differences in equipment is great. His skis were, of course, of solid hickory, and by some hard talking he was able to persuade the Northland Ski Company to make him a special pair as short as six feet. His poles, stout hickory hoe handles, certainly wouldn't break. A wonderful self-portrait in camp, taken with a self-timer camera, shows him in front of his tarn lean-to, bent over the cast iron skillet containing his dinner. Sheltered by the lean-to is the latest in sleeping bags, a "12-pound down robe," and stuck in a log is his double-bitted axe. When the axe wasn't cutting a bough bed for Bartholomew to sleep on, it whittled steps out of slippery ice to enable him to get down off steep passes.

While everyone today wants skis of about the length Bartholomew so phophetically selected, we contemporary cross-country skiers turn up our noses at anything less than fiberglass or Kevlar. Poles are made of aluminum alloy, if not graphite. Boots may still be leather, but they're working on that one as well. The big dividend of all this new high-tech equipment is its light weight. Everything I take out for a day tour — including skis, clothes, and a beer for lunch — weighs less than that "sleeping bag" of his. Light weight spells mobility, and mobility spells freedom. The skiing route that took Bartholomew three months to traverse has recently been skied in just over seven days. The winter world, made so much more accessible by today's strong

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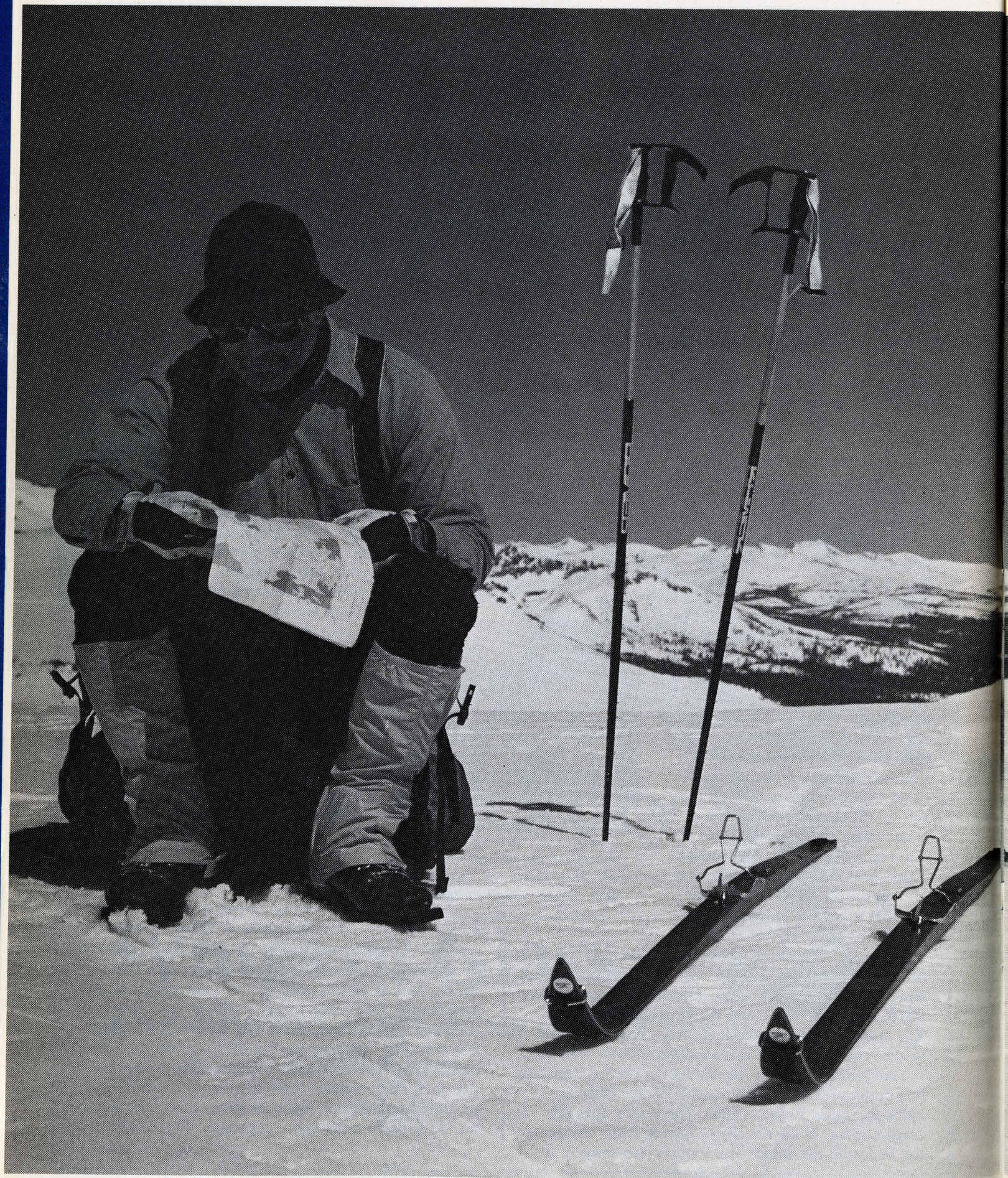


Tim Lemucchi makes a navigation stop on the Sierra Crest tour.

lightweight gear, is as serene and timeless as ever. We just need it more now.

Where, exactly, can you find these California ski touring havens? All too often, when the landscape beckons, there is no place to park, the road is lined by six-foot walls of snow, or the sight of a slope of fresh powder starts a tingle at the back of the neck that whispers "avalanche." Or you can't seem to hit upon the right wax, and wind up skating unceremoniously in place. Or the lure of the slopes is beckoning you, but you just plain didn't bring skis.

A touring center can be the answer to all of these potential problems, so I've selected a few of the best from the Sierra. They may not always be the closest for the would-be skier, but we think they're the finest.

In the process of researching them, I've discovered an interesting trend — the ski touring scene is beginning to take on a distinctly Continental flavor. The *idea* of ski touring (to say nothing of the snug reality of alpine huts as shelters against the chill of a long winter night) has been imported wholesale. Who *really* likes to snow camp? We do it, to get to great places otherwise inaccessible in the wilderness, however, none but the most dedicated masochist prefers lugging all that gear around, trying to piece together metal tent poles in the freezing dusk, or sitting for hours with a crick in the neck waiting for water to boil for soup or tea.

Don't get me wrong. No Californian who has savored the winter wilderness would think of giving all that we have up in favor of the European system. With a mountain hut every ten kilometers in any direction all over the Alps, not to mention ski lifts up every valley and flocks of helicopters in between, the Europeans have squeezed the wilderness right out of that beautiful mountain range. In California, we've got it made, with a huge supply of the world's most fragile resource — wild nature. Back country should be hard to get to,

and next to impossible to stay in. At least the hard-core heart of the wilderness should remain that way for those who relish its challenge. All around its edges, the wild lands are more accessible to those without the desire to plunge into its mainstream.

All over California, huts are springing up to ease the transition. Buy a bunk and breakfast two miles off the road and put more skiing in the ski weekend. Some of these huts are old fishing cabins pressed into off-season use. Others were built as ski huts fifty years ago by the Sierra Club. And a few of the newest ones are prefabricated portables that go up for the winter and come back out in the spring.

The sheer size of California means that choice ski touring areas are not equally accessible to all residents. The crest of the Sierra runs down the lower dogleg of the state — 400 miles from the Lake Tahoe area southward to the edge of the Mojave Desert — without a single open east-west passage throughout the winter. The state is, in effect, divided. It never has been that easy to get across the mountains — the Donnor party couldn't make it, and neither can we. Thus, Northern California skiers go to Tahoe, Yosemite and other areas on the west side, while Southern Californians gravitate to the east side of the mountains, mainly winding up in Mammoth or June Lake.

Where you go for ski touring will likely depend not only on whether you're a beginner, intermediate, or expert skier, but on where you're coming from. I've tried to recommend at least one of each type of tour or lodging on either side of the mountains.

EAST SIERRA

FROM THE SHADOWS

Bishop Creek

By 2 p.m. on Sunday, the ski weekend is over. Even the racers ski only a few hours a day, you like to remind yourself, sliding off the Mammoth lifts or wincing away from the Tamarack skate lanes. Its *quality* ski time that counts. The comfort of the bucket seats eases the screams of your back muscles and — well on the road to the south, after a second bottle of Calistoga water and half a bran muffin — you're feeling almost perky again.

And what's this?

Even at road speed, the car seems to teeter on the edge of an abyss. Just past Tom's place — gotta try that funky bar sometime — everything seems to open and fall away at once. There's Bishop, familiar down there below, but the rest of the scene is a shock, perhaps because you missed seeing it in the darkness of Friday's northward drive. The scale is simply too colossal to believe.

Take that peak to the right . . . The big one, Mt. Tom. You'd need to stack Half Dome on top of Mammoth Mountain to reach its top, nearly two vertical miles above the green oasis of Round Valley at its feet. Uproot Mt. Tom and set it next to Everest itself and, from base camp to the summit, their heads would be as close as those of lovers.

Now Everest has never been skied from the top, but in the record winter of 1969, when snow stood waist-deep in the streets of Bishop, Carl McCoy stepped into his bindings on the Summit of Mt. Tom. He was in a hurry, alone up there with only half an hour of daylight. The third son of Mammoth Mountain owner Dave McCoy, Carl had grown up on skis and had raced downhill with the national team's Talent Squad. He was the right man to be there.

At first, he picked his way carefully down the well-corniced North Ridge. Only as he dropped into Elderberry Canyon — that crecent-shaped gully that forms a 5,000-foot ski run even in a drought year — was Carl ready to open it up, banking off canyon walls as he shot toward the twilight valley, so far below.

Nobody paid much attention to his feat. Ski mountaineering was a mere toddler as a sport in the Sierra nearly twenty years ago and it would be a decade until anyone could look back and recognize Carl's bold run of Mt. Tom as the

Muir Pass Hut, Kings Canyon National Park.

ushering in of an era, a Golden Age of daring ski descents from the tops of peaks that continues today.

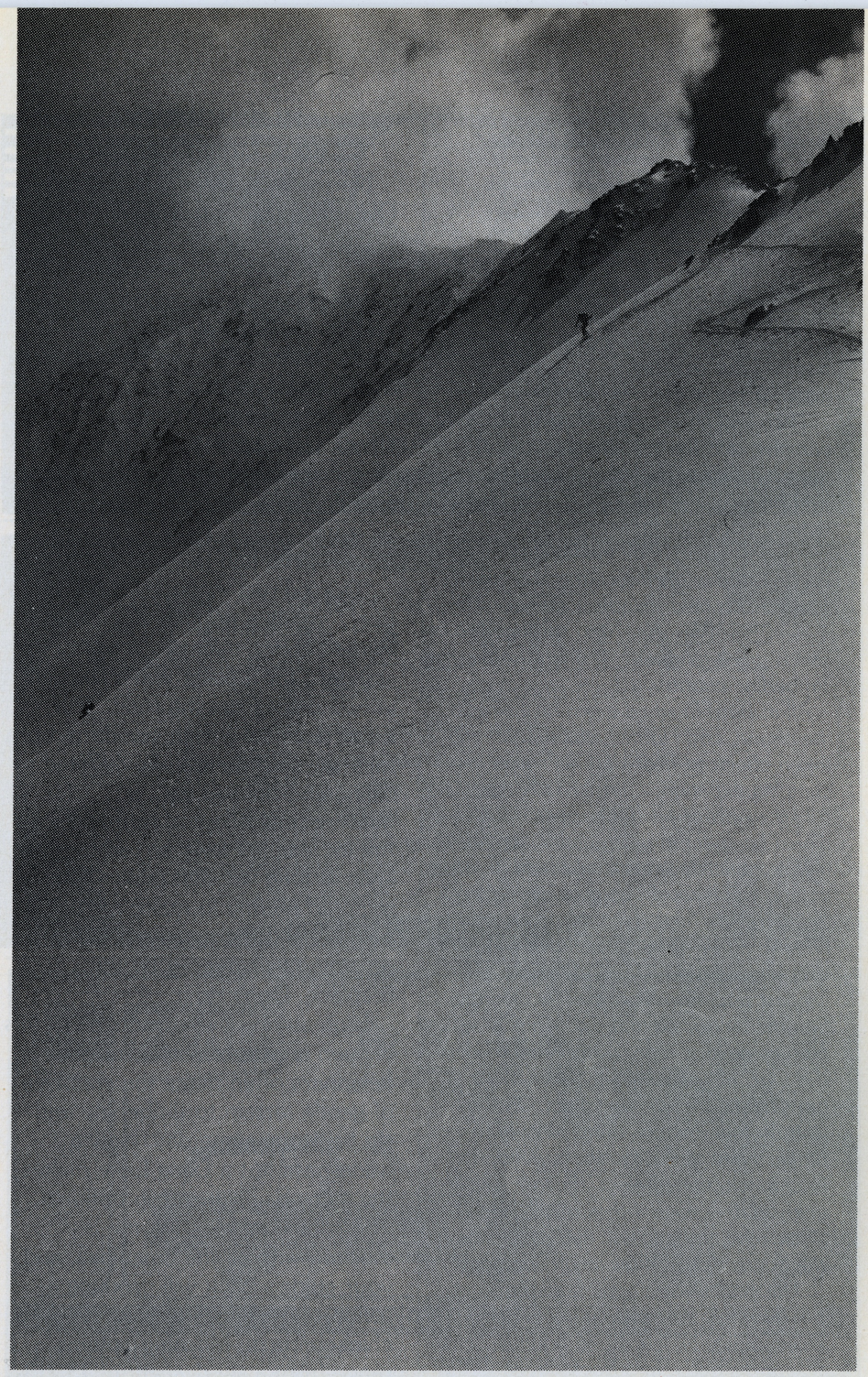
Remembering Carl McCoy's skiing milestone, pull over at the scenic turnout on Sherwin Grade and take a closer look. Along the Sierra skyline to the left, observe the rocky knobs that make up the Palisades, with more 14,000-foot summits than the Whitney group. And lots more rugged, with a dozen glaciers scattered at their feet.

Between Mt. Tom and the Palisades, hiding its grandeur in the lengthening blue shadow cast by the Sierra Crest, lies the massive drainage area of Bishop Creek. The skiing there, you are now prepared to expect, runs the whole wonderful gamut from ideal beginner terrain for the first tentative shuffles along the South Fork road to the challenge of unskied gullies of the Crest. Finally, for the skier wanting to sample the area's delights, there are services to match.

> "Discovering the mountains, after all, is what skiing is all about."

Allan Bard greets winter guests in the doorway of the Bishop Creek Lodge. Man and building have been in the Sierra a long time. Allan forged the Red Line Traverse (*Sierra Life January/February 1986*), a ski tour so bold that it never wavers more than a half a mile from the very crest of the Sierra, covering countless north faces while weaving its way 200 miles from Mt. Whitney all the way north to Mammoth. Bishop Creek Lodge, long appreciated by fishermen for its good food, cheery bar and snug cabins, is now home to Allan's Alpine Expeditions, offering a wide range of guided ski tours.

Classic ski touring, that's Allan's emphasis. If a beginner, you would be wise to take your first steps on nordic rather than alpine skis — walking before you slide. But there is no need to go in circles, either. Try an easy tour with lunch on the snow. Discovering the mountains is, after all, what skiing is all about.



Five thousand feet of "twist and shout!"

The next step would be a weekend hut tour to nearby Parcher's Camp. It's fully catered, your luggage is sledded up for you, and the tips on skiing never stop. A Monday ticket discount lets you combine any weekend package at Bishop Creek with a downhill day on Mammoth Mountain, after you've tuned up and the visitors have left the lifts to the locals.

Beyond the realm of Alpine Expeditions, the snowy wilderness beckons. The skilled and ambitious can bite on a stretch of the Red Line itself. Allan, while focusing his attentions on the newcomer to high touring, has laid out a unique string of fully stocked timber camps. The Sierra Crest has never been so accessible.

Alpine Expeditions, P.O. Box 1751, Bishop, CA 93514, or call Allan himself at (619) 873-5617.

continued on next page

HARVEY'S HIGH TOUR

Harvey had paid his dues and this winter, he knew, it was time to take the plunge. His first tentative strides in tracks had been just two winters ago, but something about the experience brought him back the next weekend, and by the end of the season he was stepping out regularly — acquiring a taste for uncut back country snow.

Then last winter, it was snow camping and those three days of downhill skiing. He knew, of course, that he wouldn't continue buying lift tickets, but what he learned about platform and balance made him so much steadier on the new metal-edged touring skis he'd found on sale at Wheeler & Wilson's. Now he hoped to join a week-long tour through the Sierra timberline country.

Allan Bard laughed when he came to the phone, and Harvey was a little taken aback to hear that his snow camping experience wasn't necessary. All six nights of his hut-hopping tour would be spent in plush alpine camps, with completely provisioned huts. Four-course meals would be provided, along with sleeping bags. He wouldn't even have to carry all his gear, he would simply need a day pack. Allan did suggest a weekend on the lifts at Snow Summit before the tour, not that Harvey needed more proficiency to join the tour, he would simply have more fun skiing if he was tuned up. On the tour, in fact, he was amazed at how fitfully some of the members skied, and how much, nonetheless, they obviously enjoyed it — even if they might envy those who could follow the guides down the bonus slopes after lunch each day.

The guides were good-humored and fun and their tips improved Harvey's skiing ability by leaps and bounds. "His telemarks down into Rock Creek Canyon at tour's end were nearly stylish," Alan recalls with a grin. After the victory barbeque that marked their return, Harvey daydreamed through the slide show — next year the Sierra High Route.

Alpine Expeditions tour from Piute Pass to Rock Creek are scheduled for April 24-30 and May 1-7, 1988. The $650 package includes guides, community gear, food and hut lodging.

Alpine Expeditions, P.O. Box 1751, Bishop, CA 93514, (619) 873-5617. Reservations should be made as far as possible in advance as the tours fill quickly.

HUT HOPPING
Rock Creek Canyon

Norman Clyde was the Grand Old Man of Sierra mountaineering. A delightful codger with sparkling blue eyes who read the classics in Greek, he often climbed alone and had served as winter caretaker of many roadhead lodges up and down the Sierra. I had the good fortune to meet him and ask him about skiing. "Rock Creek Canyon," he told me, "is the finest ski terrain on the east side of the Sierra." I moved in the next winter. For the past several winters, I've had neighbors.

"Don't Trust Anyone Under 9,373 Feet," reads a popular Rock Creek Winter Lodge t-shirt — a pretty high standard for a place that's snowed in two miles from the road. The lodge *does* set a high standard, both for their staff (fanatically devoted to skiing and blessed with a mischievious sense of fun) and for the incredible meals served family-style at long wooden tables. One is tempted merely to make a quick turn around the meadows before returning to hang out by the fireplace. Don't do it.

High among the attractions of this canyon is accessibility. First-time beginners often make the six miles of gentle terrain to timberline and ski back the same day. Now a wilderness hut a Long Lake makes the same-day return trip optional. The roomy geodesic dome is stocked with all the amenities, and, your guide's pack will produce a gallon of fresh leek soup and chicken curry. Morning options range from a ski descent of 13,713-foot Bear Creek Spire for the restless to an easy tour on to the hut at Mosquito Flat for the powder hound. In case you aren't ready yet to tear yourself away from the beautiful canyon, move on to the Tamarack Hut for another night.

Rock Creek Winter Lodge, Route 1 Box 5, Mammoth Lakes, CA 93546, or telephone (619) 935-4464.

A SHAGGY BEAR TALE
Tamarack Lodge

If the proverbial bear went over Mammoth Mountain, what he would see on the other side would be Tamarack Lodge. Cords of aromatic pine would flank his entry into the great hall where a stone fireplace beckons. Smoothing the fur back from his shaggy brow while balancing a glass of wine, he might exclaim, suddenly and to no one in particular, "I was cutting turns down through Hole-in-the-Wall and that great woolly Mammoth was right behind me, stylin' in that suave French way of his — Nice Beaujolais — I swear, that flatfoot is light on his skis, whether he's on the face of Shuttlebus or shedding my lift ticket. I need a nap before dinner."

Knocking back the last drop in his glass, he shambled upstairs to his waiting suite, the tasteful appointments of which he preferred even to the freshly refurbished comforts of the outlying cabins. When he reappeared for dinner (clad in his customary "tails" but not in white tie), he enjoyed the unpretentious elegance of Tamarack, its Lakeside Restaurant quite likely the best in town.

Tomorrow, the bear reflected between his entree and the arrival of the dessert tray, he would have to take a skating lesson. More superbly groomed miles of skate lanes— added to what must already have been the most extensive track system in the Eastern Sierra— offered the chance to stretch his legs and leave, at last, that great woolly Mammoth shrinking on the horizon.

It's so calm and peaceful at Tamarack, it's hard to believe that just down the road are the bright lights of Mammoth Lakes — a sort of Newport Beach in down jackets. The choice is yours —follow the bear into the woods, or accept the lure of bright lights just down the road.

For information about Tamarack Lodge, telephone (619) 934-2442.

TAKING FIRST STRIDES
Sierra Meadows - Mammoth

Sierra Meadows is just what the name implies, a huge, rolling open space on the eastern edge of the town of Mammoth — and a good place to take your first strides in a

nordic ski track.

Don't equate beginner-safe with dull, though. After checking out rental skis, or waxing your own, step outside to the machine groomed tracks and it hits you. No amount of touring east of the Rockies can prepare you for the sheer scale of a Western vista, and this is, indeed, a great one. Town disappears into forest, and the lifts up on Mammoth Mountain are mostly around on the other side. The Sierra Crest is low here, a quirk of topography that allows so much snow to spill over on the prevailing westerlies. It's to the east that the view *really* opens up, extending across the open country, past a whiff of steam near Hot Creek and over Glass Mountain to the crest of the Whites, standing out crisply against the blue horizon — way out on the edge of Nevada.

At a place like this, it's a pleasure to remember what your instructor has been telling you all along: Don't look at your ski tips, lift your eyes.

After a couple of turns around the meadow, you begin to notice an inviting slope across the way. Go ahead, try a downhill run, maybe a turn or two. Enjoy it while you can. The steep chutes and bowls on the ridge above are slated to become part of the Sherwin Bowls Ski Area, so this may all be changed when next you return.

Sierra Meadows Ski Touring Center, P.O. Box D-4, Mammoth Lakes, CA 93546, telephone (619) 934-6161.

FAR OUT!
Tioga Pass Winter Ski Resort

The newest ski touring lodge in the Sierra is also the most remote. For now, at least. Tioga Pass Winter Resort sits nearly on the crest of the range, just two miles from the eastern edge of Yosemite National Park. The cheerful lodge and surrounding cabins at 9,500 feet forms the hub for a wide variety of skiing: tour gently along a snowed-in road out to Saddlebag Lakes or over to the park; switchback up to telemark bowls behind the lodge; or climb steeply to descents off Mt. Dana or Conness.

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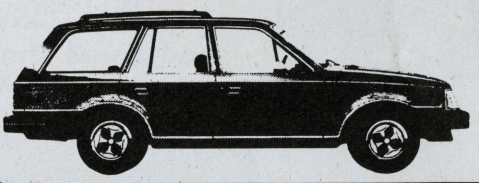
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Allan Bard launches into "Wahoo" Gulley, headed straight down to Bishop — if the snow holds up.

Jim Harper, owner of the resort, knows that stretch of the crest intimately. He spent the past five winters as the back country ranger in Tuolumne Meadows, ten miles to the west, watching over the ski tourists who are flocking in increasing numbers to that winter mecca. He looked around and skied everywhere before moving up to Tioga Pass where skiing is better, more varied, more accessible.

More accessible once you have gotten to the Winter Resorts lodge, that is. Getting to Tioga Pass Winter Resort is an adventure that enhances its reputation for remoteness. Six miles. Two thousand feet of ascent. It's easy touring, though, up a road — and a snowmobile might just come by to take your luggage.

Jim senses that his fledgling resort sits at what will one day be a major intersection. Years from now we may well look back on him as that nomad who, first pitching his tent where two camel trails crossed, founded a trading center. The easiest stretch of the Sierra Crest Tour passes right by his doorstep on its way to Mammoth and the best-known of all the trans-Sierra ski tours crosses Tioga Pass en route to Yosemite Valley. That tour, following a road nearly all the way, is the novices ideal first trans-Sierra passage. The cabins at Tioga Pass Winter Resort will provide a link with Yosemite Mountaineering's huts on Tuolumne and on the rim of the Valley, creating the only trans-Sierra served entirely by huts. What luxury! Imagine day-touring, with no more load than lunch and a parka, clear across the Sierra.

But wait, there's more. A charter flying service is developing plans to shuttle guests into the resort by ski plane by next winter, direct from the coast.

Quick then. Slide on up to Tioga Pass Winter Resort this winter. It will be your last chance to be a pioneer. Rates run from $50 to $55 per day, including breakfast and dinner.

Write Tioga Pass Winter Resort (no phones that far out!), P.O. Box 330, Lee Vining, CA 93541.

NORTH SIERRA

FAST TRACKS

Kirkwood

The most exciting track skiing around Tahoe isn't really near the lake at all. Just south of Tahoe, over a couple of short passes, lies the self-contained resort of Kirkwood. Skiers coming from the San Francisco Bay area may come to Kirkwood directly, taking route 88, skimming the ridgetops of the Gold Country.

The ski instructors, Debbie Waldear and Mike Lannoy (each an overall first place finisher in Far West ski racing in recent winters), are experts at getting novices started out right. A little coaching goes a long way when you first step into the track — preventing bad habits that you would only need to

unlearn later. Mike and Debbie like to use the video camera on their students, too; there's nothing like an instant replay to point up strengths and weaknesses.

Nordic tracks *do* come around to complete a circle — eventually — but that doesn't mean the skier's options are horribly limited. This winter, if you double-poled away from the main Kirkwood complex and kept to the right tracks, you would wind up on the new Schneider Camp trail system

Beginners and intermediates have the option of getting there by driving two miles east up the highway). There, the open, rolling terrain, with the advantage of higher ground, is available for all to enjoy. Views include the Desolation Wilderness to the north and the Sierra Crest stretching to the south. You might also catch a glimpse of Olympic Biathlon skier Glenn Jobe breezing by as though he owned the place. He does.

Kirkwood Cross Country Ski Area, P.O. Box 77, Kirkwood, CA 95646, (209) 258-8864.

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MAKING TRACKS

Just what is track skiing anyway? Nordic tracks differ from those left by downhill skiers in that they run not only behind the skier, but in front of him as well. Rather than *making* his tracks, the Nordic skier *follows* them. The tracks in question are a set of grooves in the snow a few inches deep and just under shoulder's width apart. They are made by the runners of a heavy sled dragged behind a snow cat. Often there are two sets established, side by side, allowing for skiers to travel with company or pass a slower skier. The novice slots his skis into the track and, suddenly, everything changes. It's like being on rails. You don't need to worry about pointing your skis or having them skid out from under you. All you need to do is stride, kick and glide.

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CROSS COUNTRY GOES DOWNHILL
Donner Ski Ranch

Cross-country skiers have been invading the alpine lifts in such numbers in recent years that it's a rare day when you don't see several of them skiing agressively down the steepest of chutes. Look at the west face of KT-22 at Squaw Valley, or the Dropout Chutes just off Mammoth's new Chair 23 . . . and look again. They aren't all skiing the low and graceful telemark turn; some of them ski parallel and are hard to tell from downhillers — they streak by just as fast.

If you're not quite ready to jump into those boots without a warmup, then you're probably ready for Donner Ski Ranch. Chair lifts running up to a knob that sits right in Donner Pass serves intermediate terrain, and the Donner Ski Ranch specializes in nodic skiing. Ski and boot rentals are available, as well as lessons in telemark or parallel technique, telemark races and demo days. Many runs are deliberately left ungroomed to provide snow suited for working on back country ski techniques.

To get there, take Interstate 80 to the Norden-Soda Springs exit and follow the old road for three miles, past sugar bowl. Reasonable weekend rates of $20 per day go down to $15 midweek, and only $10 on Wednesday. Just across the road, perched right on the pass, is the Donner Spitz Hut, where bunk and breakfast are only $15, nordic is the universal language, and there are movies in the lounge in the evening.

WEST SIERRA
NORDIC SKI CENTER
Bear Valley

The U.S. Nordic Demo Team is a squad of ten elite ski instructors chosen from around the country who give clinics and demonstrations every winter. It is a measure of the stature of the Bear Valley Nordic Ski Center that this year's Demo Team is headed by its director, Paul Petersen. Despite the demands of teaching with the team, he will still be home in Bear Valley much of the winter, offering the best of private or group lessons twice a day.

Bear Valley is a skier's resort known for its fine alpine as well as nordic terrain. Forty kilometers of track are set fresh daily, graded and marked by difficulty, ranging from easy turns around the meadow to ambitious and challenging loops through the forest and along the ridges. After a good workout, stop by the warming hut and sit by the wood stove or stretch out on the sundeck. Just half a kilometer out on the track system, it's a good place for the family to regroup after the kids complete their weekend *kinderski* programs. The hut serves homemade soup and goodies, cocoa and beer. Rental and demo skis are available through the Bear Valley Sport Shop, and special programs include race clinics, nordic downhill lessons (to expert level) at the ski lift, and the annual Bjornloppet race (20-or 10-K) in March.

If you've been intrigued by the idea of back country lodges, but aren't sure you're ready for the ruggedness of it all, consider the Powderbears Cabin. Located five minutes from the road, it is the most accessible of all the back country places in California. It's also the plushest. Accommodations for eight include a fully equipped housekeeping kitchen and even indoor plumbing. Your bags, and non-skiing friends, can be delivered by snow cat.

Bear Valley is on the west side of the Sierra, between Lake Tahoe and Yosemite, just four and one-half hours from the Bay Area on Highway 4. Telephone (209) 753-6139.

YOSEMITE OVERLOOK
Badger Pass

The thought of skiing in Yosemite has its own special appeal. The 4,000-foot valley floor, however, is just too low to have consistent snow cover, so Yosemite's cross-country ski school has moved its base of operations to Badger Pass. Not only can they offer cross-country instruction on the alpine lifts there, they have also set up a track along ten miles of a snowed-in road to their new hut at Glacier Point. The view downward 3,000 feet into the Valley is spectacular, as is that upward past Half Dome to the winter high country. To be able to enjoy both views from the same spot defies description. It's worth lingering there, so the school provides two- and three-day trips, guided and fully catered, out to the hut and back.

"If that whets your appetite—and who could resist—the touring school offers a six—day tour of Tuolumne Meadows."

As the terrain is mostly level, any fairly fit novice can step into the freshly cut track and glide on out to Glacier Point almost as easily as he or she could walk there in summer, getting a taste of the high country in winter as well.

If that whets your appetite — and who could resist? — the touring school offers a more ambitious six-day tour to Tuolumne Meadows, heart of the Park's high country. The addition last season of a new hut on the Valley's rim has converted this tour to a no-snow-camping proposition. On the second day up, skiing across Tenaya Lake offers access to the Tuolumne dome country. For the next two days, the tour is based in Tuolumne Meadows to allow time for meandering along the river to take a run off the skirt of Lembert Dome, just as pictured in a snapshot taken by young Ansel Adams during the fledgling years of California ski touring.

continued on page 20

TURN IT LOW BEFORE YOU GO.

The power to help hold back rental costs at Mammoth Mountain is right at your fingertips. Just turn down the heat when you're not in your house, condo or hotel room.

If everyone would lower the heat and check to make sure that lights, appliances and electric blankets are all off, it could make a difference. So please, before you go, turn your heat down low. Thank you for using energy wisely.

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The twenty-mile push back down to the Valley in a day offers a fitting climax to the tour.

Contact Yosemite Mountaineering School at (209) 372-1244.

EVERYTHING YOU ALWAYS WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT NORDIC SKIING*
***But Were Afraid to Ask**

EXPENSE

Although the days of finding $39.95 package deals for skis, boots and poles may be history, cross-country skiing is still a relatively inexpensive sport to pursue. Rental gear is available most places in the $8-$10 per day range, with high performance or demo gear averaging a couple of dollars more, and significant reductions for any of it when rented by the week. Good metal-edged skis and stiff boots designed for cross-country downhill skiing are becoming widely available as well. Some centers will rent *everything* else one might need when struck with the sudden desire to go touring without even having packed long johns. Day pants, gaiters, parkas and the like are all offered on a rental basis.

Set tracks are best appreciated after about an hour of breaking your own trail. I suggest breakable crust. Driving a snow cat through freezing early dawn hours day after day isn't cheap, or easy. Then there's that summer work of clearing brush and grading so the snow cats can get through in the winter. When you think about it, $2 to $8.50 a day for using a set track is pretty reasonable. Many areas include a nordic patrol in the fee as well.

Lodging and meals, offered by many centers to complete the package, are cheaper midweek, or when taken a week at a time. Look around, though, many touring centers are in relatively remote areas where nearby motel rooms are a bargain at offseason prices.

OUTFIT

The terrain and climate of the Sierra make the needs of the nordic skier considerably different than those in other parts of the world.

The first thing a skier, not accustomed to the Sierra, needs is a day pack. It will come in handy as all those layers of clothing are shed at the insistence of the California winter sun. As my neighbor Tom Carter likes to say, "We get alot of storms in the Sierra — sunstorms!" The first thing to pack in your day-pack, then, is a big tube of sunblock. After that a shade hat, which comes out when the wool hat goes in. And dark glasses.

Then a few survival options. Extra mittens and socks (in case someone *else* falls down and gets wet). A wind parka with hood and, many think, a light pair of wind pants, are pretty useful too. I always carry a one ounce silk mask, called a *balaklava*, a tube of wax (and probably the next warmer wax as well) with a scraper and a little chunk of downhill wax to get slick. And a space blanket and matches — just in case.

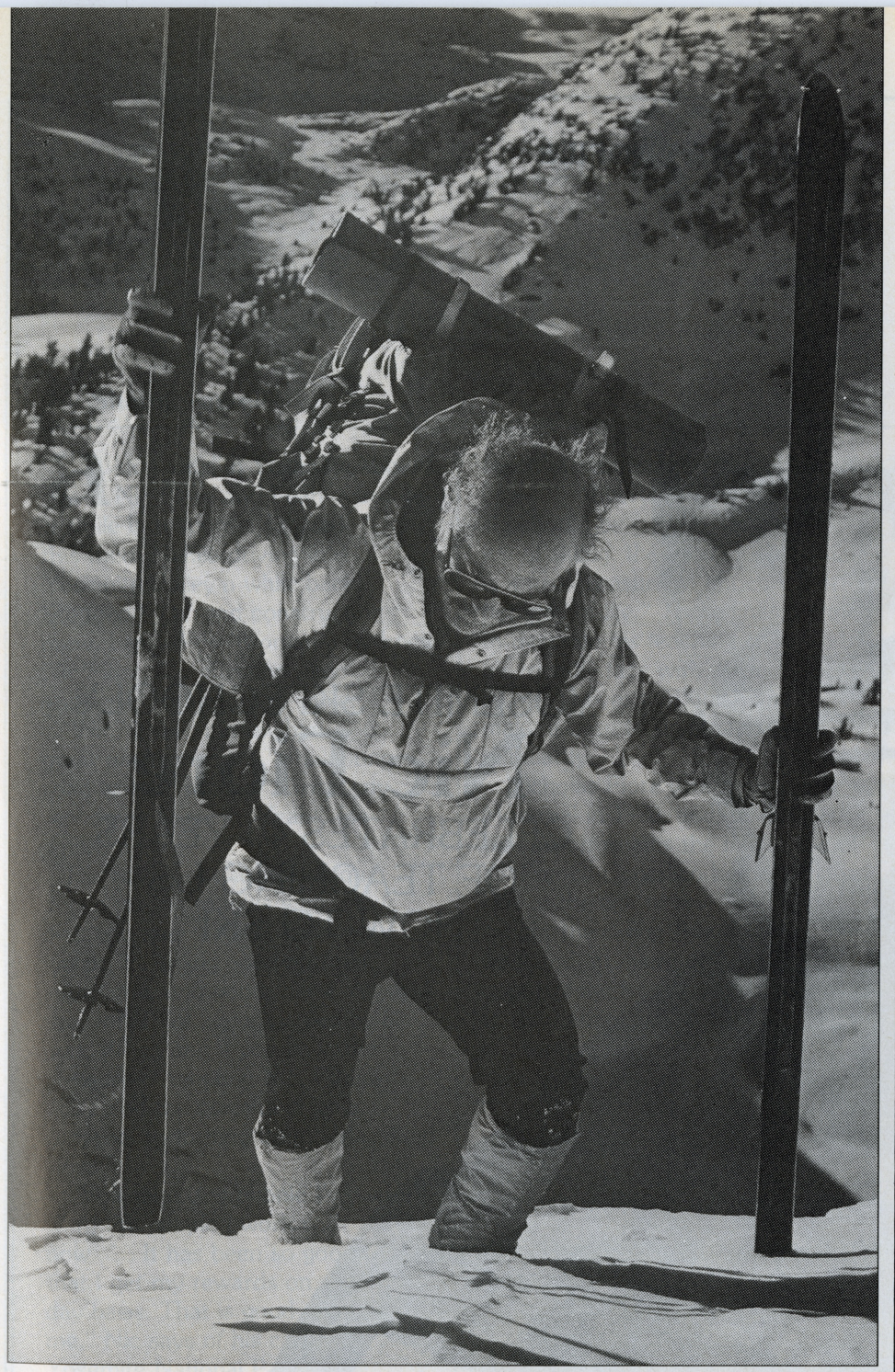
Be sure to leave room for a quart of water and a trail lunch. You might as well keep your lunch "all California." Start with a bottle of Chardonnay to cool in a snowbank, a Robert Mondavi '83 will do. Then the Golden State's answer to French Camembert from the Rouge et Noir Cheese factory, to be spread on Ak-Mak crackers (the finest), baked in Sanger. Top it off with a fresh orange and an avocado.

Bon Journe

SPRING SKIING

Dedicated cross-country skiers don't simply fade away come Easter. They'd be missing too much. For the whole month of April and at least halfway into May (I started to write June — it's that bad — and we often go skiing on the Fourth of July) is golden time in the High Sierra, when the winter's snowpack settles in as something affectionately referred to as "corn snow."

Now, corn snow is second only to perfect powder as a medium to be carved up on skis, and it's a lot more readily available. Every spring morning, the sun pries the night's frozen crust off the snow and softens it to a smooth consistency



Tim Lemucchi, owner of the Tam O'Shanter in Baskerfield ascends "re—col"— too steep to ski.

that's easy for a ski edge to bite into, yet firm underneath. And, it's everywhere! A glistening expanse at least 400 miles by 40 miles, with the avalanche hazard way down, days growing longer, and temperatures climbing into the bikini range. By mid-morning, the corn snow is softened one or two inches deep and the backcountry skier, having gotten up at dawn to brew coffee and crunched his way upward over the still-frozen crust, is just snapping into bindings at the top of a peak or pass, teetering expectantly on the brink of thousands of feet of "twist and shout." Whether he's just up for the day, or deep into a month-long Sierra Crest tour, he has to laugh at the thought of all those people down below who don't know any better at this time of the year than to go to the beach.

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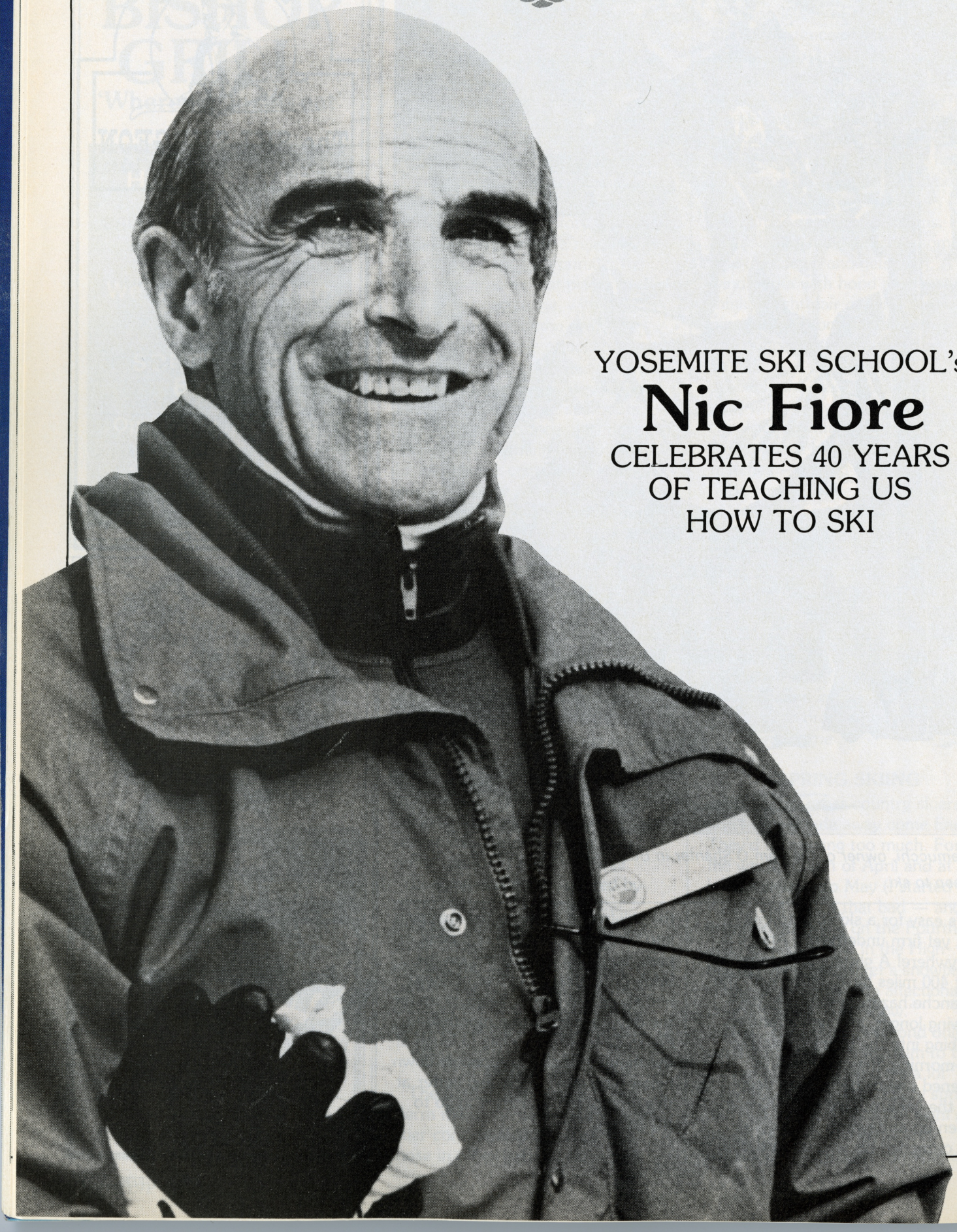


YOSEMITE SKI SCHOOL's

Nic Fiore

CELEBRATES 40 YEARS
OF TEACHING US
HOW TO SKI

by Shaun Farrell

Ask a local in Yosemite about Nic Fiore and I can guarantee a smile in response. I tested this theory while driving into Yosemite Valley a while back. Stopped by a road construction crew, I asked the flagman if he knew Nic Fiore. My question was answered with a broad smile.

"Nic? Yeah, I know him — a great powder hound," the young road worker replied. "Great guy . . . real down to earth. Yeah!" He smiled again.

His response was not unique. When talking to folks who know Nic, you hear a lot of descriptive words, including *good-natured, super guy, and good friend.* Always the words are accompanied by a grin. When and if you have the pleasure of meeting Nic, I think you'll find the corners of your own mouth turning up in a delighted smile.

"Yosemite, the people I've worked with, the people I work with now . . . It has been so good to me that I get my rewards on a day-to-day basis. That is good enough for me," Nic says of his career at Yosemite National Park.

Nic, the director of Yosemite Ski School, is spending his fortieth year teaching skiing at Badger Pass this winter. More than 85,000 people have learned the joys and excitement of downhill skiing from Nic. Parents take their kids to learn from Nic, just as their own parents took them. One gets the impression that learning the slope at Badger Pass without Nic's tutelage would be like eating pancakes without syrup.

"When I ski, I ski for pleasure," Nic writes. "When I teach, I try to teach more than just the technique of a turn. Everyone who learns to ski should be given an idea of the joy of skiing, the thought that skiing is a new pleasure to enrich his or her way of life." These lines, penned to describe his teaching style, and his friendly face with its deep-set, sparkling eyes and quick smile, make it easy to understand his popularity.

Nicholas Fiore was born in Montreal in 1920, and, to this day, his speech retains the inflections of his French-Canadian home. First on skis at the age of seven, Nic quickly caught the skiing "bug." Every weekend, at every possible opportunity, he would catch a train to the Laurentian Mountains north of Montreal, out to get his skiing "fix."

> "When Nic first arrived in Yosemite in late 1947, it was with the intention of staying just one ski season."

In 1944, Nic was certified as an instructor by the Canadian Ski Alliance and began teaching in the Laurentians. Although, some years earlier, following another of his passions, he had turned professional as a bicycle racer, it was in ski instruction that he found his career niche.

When Nic first arrived in Yosemite, in late 1947, it was with the intention of staying for just that skiing season. Along with two other Canadians, he had received an invitation from Luggi Foeger, then director of Yosemite Ski School, whom he had met the previous year, to come and teach at Yosemite. Nic, a college student in Montreal at the time, saw the invitation as a chance to visit California and to improve his English skills. After consulting his widowed mother and his school counselor, Nic accepted the offer, intending to return home in the spring.

Nic still vividly remembers his first day in Yosemite: December 7, 1947. He and his two companions had arrived the previous night, during a storm. Awakening in the morning, Nic looked out on three feet of fresh, powdery snow. The sky was clear as he wandered around the old Yosemite Lodge, gazing at the awesome granite walls surrounding the valley. Luggi Foeger pulled up, opening his station wagon door, and Nic exclaimed, "Luggi, It's fantastic! But where do the beginners ski?"

He was soon taken to Badger Pass, 22 miles away. The more Nic skied the mountain, the more he liked it. When spring came and it was time to return to Canada, Nic was easily convinced to stay on for the summer. When fall arrived, he knew that he would again be staying for the winter. The beautiful Park had hooked him: it was to be his home.

The early fifties found Nic spending his winters happily working for Luggi Foeger, who was also his greatest influence as an instructor. "In those days," Nic recalls, "Luggi was the guru of skiing. We all looked up to him and followed his directions absolutely."

Once Nic decided that being a ski instructor was his life's work, he never looked back, devoting his life

High Sierra Highjinks

With an average of only six instructors working Bager Pass in the early 1950s, as opposed to around 30 today, the small group carried on in sort of a clubhouse atmosphere. Practical jokes were common and "paybacks" went 'round and 'round. Nic Fiore recalls one of these episodes with particular amusement.

Luggi Foeger and his instructors were involved in making skiing films. Getting up early every morning, they would load up heavy packs of camera equipment, don their skis, and head out for Ostrander Hut (a stone lodge about nine miles from Badger Pass) to shoot footage for the films. Luggi always took the lead during these expeditions. One morning, while his boss hesitated on the trail, Nic made the mistake of passing him, a *faux pas* that apparently did not sit well with Luggi.

The following day, it was Nic's turn to carry the heaviest pack of equipment. Upon hoisting the pack, he noticed that it was heavier than usual — heavier, in fact, than any he had ever encountered. Saying nothing, he fell into line with the others. Luggi set out at a blistering pace and Nic found himself struggling to keeo up. His ski skins kept slipping off during the ascent toward their destination.

They finally reached the crest of the hill where they were to begin shooting for the day, but the weather had turned bad and they were forced to turn back. Nic, unable to control his heavy pack, let the others take off ahead of him. His companions waited for him in a group at the bottom of the hill while he made his precarious descent. Suddenly, without warning, Nic lost control and went careening down the hill toward the small group gathered at the bottom. They were barely able to get out of his way as he flew past them and finally skidded to a halt. Later, Nic discovered that Luggi had loaded the pack with a few "extra" rocks.

Not to be outdone, Nic plotted his revenge. Knowing of Luggi's habit of picking up unattended tubes of ski wax, Nic concocted a mixture of paraffin and sticky wax, tinted it properly, and left it out for his victim. Sure enough, Luggi took the bait. The next day, Luggi waxed his skis and caught the lift up the mountain. Nic waited five minutes before following. While riding the lift up the hill, Nic spied Luggi angrily walking downward . . . with six inches of snow stuck to his skis.

to passing along his joy in the sport he loves. When Luggi left Yosemite in 1956, Nic was appointed director of Yosemite Ski School, a position he has held ever since.

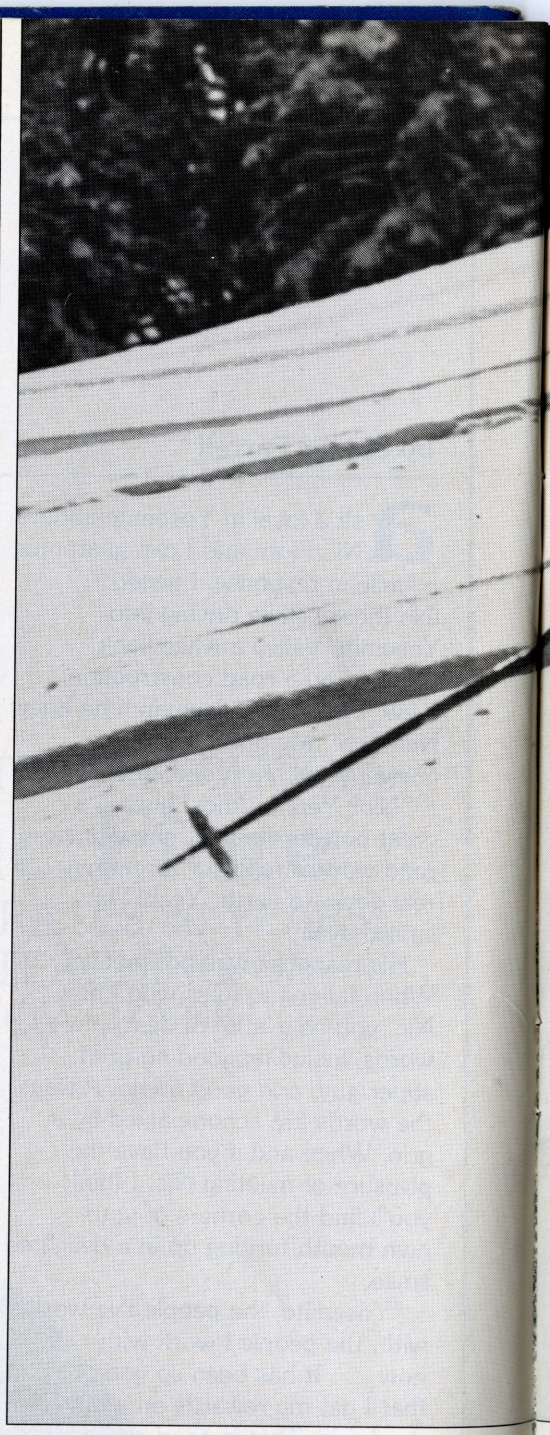
Nic Fiore's contributions to skiing, however, go beyond the thousands of students he has taught at Badger Pass. In 1949, he became involved in the Far West Ski Instructors Association, serving variously as treasurer, examiner and officer, and presently as its executive director, a position he has held for fifteen years. During the 60s, he wrote a series of articles about skiing for the *Fresno Bee*, following up with a book entitled *So You Want to Ski*, published in 1965. In 1967, Nic was invited to attend the French Ski Instructors' course in Chamonix, France, a ten-week course that is the final step in the certification of French ski instructors. While in France, he helped organize exchanges of French and American instructors.

Dave McCoy, owner of Mammoth/June Mountain Ski Resorts, has known Nic since he first came to Yosemite. Meeting at Far West Ski Instructor's meetings every year, the two just hit it off.

"Nic makes the most of his time in a day, more than anyone I know. He's always so full of energy and is just really a special person," says McCoy of the man he has known professionally and as a friend for nearly forty years.

McCoy's opinion of Nic is perhaps the consensus of his peers in the sport of skiing. It is unquestionable that Nic is a paragon of his profession. In 1980, the P.S.I.A. selected Nic to represent American instructors in Austria, at a publicity function put on by the Austrian Department of Tourism.

In the summertime, as he has for twenty-five years, Nic runs Yosemite's "High Sierra Camps." He leaves behind his wife and home in Yosemite Valley each summer and moves into a tent in Tuolumne Meadows. From this base camp, he walks out to supervise the five permanent summer camps. Now 67



years old, Nic still covers up to twenty miles a day on foot, traveling from camp to camp.

Nic still enjoys bicyling and can often be seen riding around Yosemite Valley. Each year, he makes a ten day cycle pilgrimage to the Napa Valley, pedaling among the vineyards. "I love the romance of the wine country," he enthuses, admitting, however, that he rarely drinks more than half a glass of wine.

Last year, Nic made another important trip, this one back to Montreal. He and his four brothers and seven sisters helped his mother

continued on page 26

Top:Nic Fiore enjoys a day on the slopes at Badger Pass.
Right: Teaching the children of children he taught a generation earlier.

continued from page 24

celebrate her 100th birthday. Nic was the seventh child born into the family of twelve children, he was just seven years old when his father died. His mother was pregnant with the youngest of the twelve and was left to raise the family on her own.

"Early on, I learned the importance of teamwork, of pulling together," Nic says.

Nic and his wife of thirty-seven years, Midge, have raised two daughters in Yosemite. Both are Stanford graduates. During their college years, the girls would leave school for a quarter and return to Yosemite to teach skiing with their father. Nic remembers returning home with them after a day of instructing. The two, exhausted, admitted they had never realized just how hard their dad's work was.

Nic is working the slopes of Badger Pass as energetically as ever this year, and figures he has found the key to longevity in his demanding work, "It's all the little interests. You stay in shape, your outlook is good. Every day is an experience."

In honor of Nic's fortieth year at Yosemite, Badger Pass is offering several skiing specials, including his popular "Learn to Ski in a Day Package." Started last winter, the package carries a guarantee that the student will learn to ski in a day or may receive his or her money back. Last year, 5,000 students tried the package with only ten asking for refunds. Obviously, a successful program run by a highly successful instructor.

Nic Fiore is celebrating his 40th Anniversary at Badger Pass by doing what he enjoys most — teaching people how to ski. And when winter snow turns to spring runoff, filling the lakes and streams of Yosemite, you'll find him spending peaceful High Sierra evenings in a tent somewhere in Tuolumne Meadows.

Forty Reasons to Ski Badger Pass

In celebration of Nic Fiore's 40th year teaching skiing in Yosemite National Park, the Badger Pass Ski Area is offering free skiing to anyone 40 years old on each day of the 1987/88 ski season. And, every 40th ticket wins an admission ticket to Marine World / Africa USA.

Nic Fiore continues to offer a money-back guarantee on $30 Learn To Ski Package (includes all-day lift ticket, two, 2-hour lessons and full rental equipment).

Senior skiers benefit from Fiore's "Silver Skier" program which provides a free season pass, and a special Silver Skiers pin, to anyone 60 years of age or older who take the Learn to Ski Package.

Daily lift tickets at Badger Pass are $20.50 for adults and $10 for children 12 years of age and under on weekends. Midweek, they drop to $17.00 and $9.50. For hotel reservations, call the Yosemite Winter Hot Line at (209) 454-2000. For ski conditions, call (209) 372-1338.

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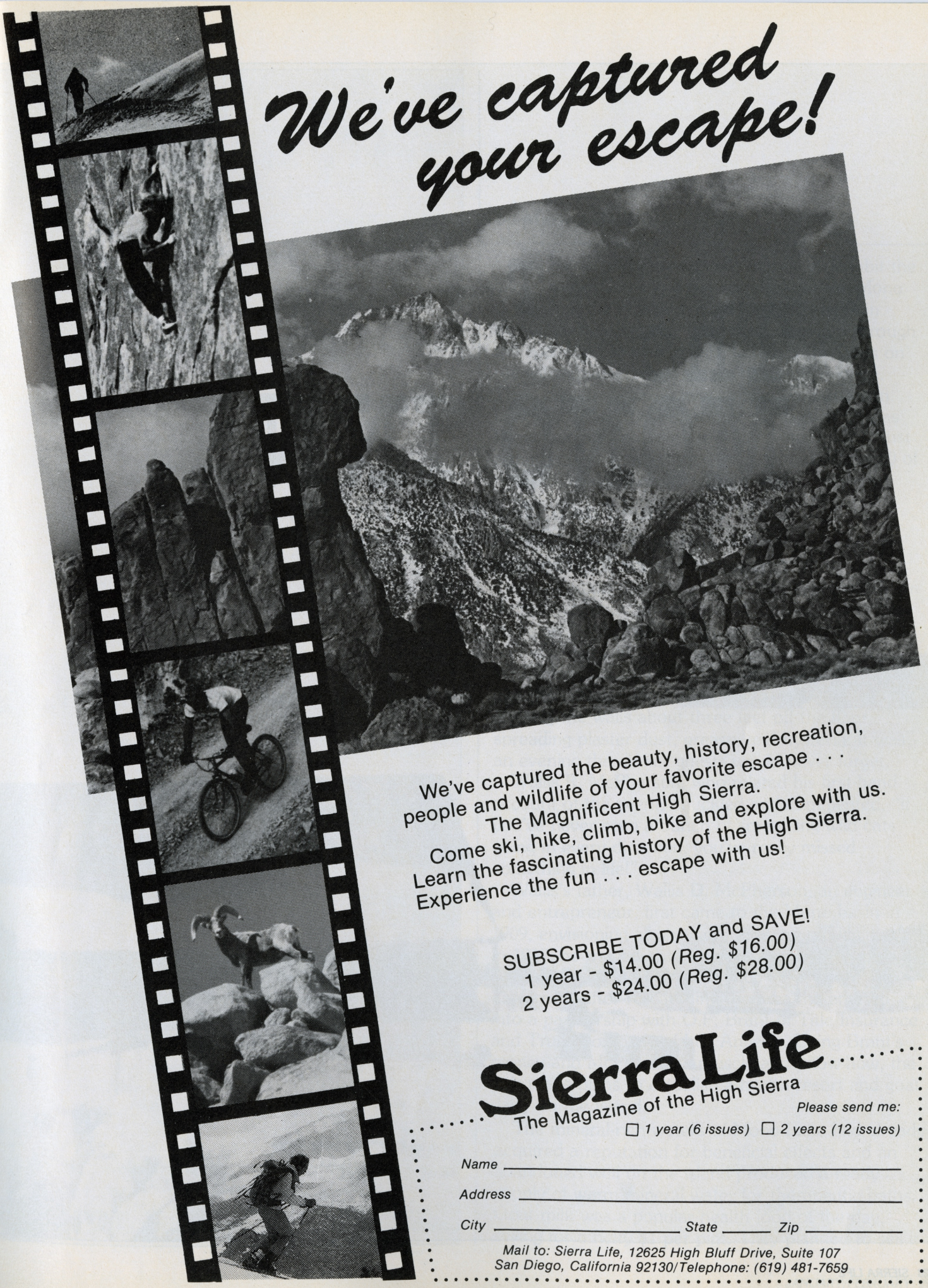

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The MONO INN

First Conceived as a Health Resort in 1922, the Mono Inn Has Remained a Landmark in the Eastern Sierra for Decades.

by Mark Allison

The cats weren't content merely to inhabit the woodpile behind the resaurant at the Mono Inn; they discovered they could sneak in through a hole into the basement, crawl up through the space in the wall, and lie between the joists on the warm plasterboard above the kitchen stove. Their presence there never presented a problem until one windy freezing winter night. A party was being held in the restaurant that evening while, just a matter of feet away, a congregation of about 30 of the wild, abandoned cats had gathered above the stove (the only available warm spot for miles around).

The weight of the cat pile was too much for the plasterboard and the ceiling caved in. Most of the cats landed on their feet, as cats generally do. They do not, however, generally land atop a sizzling hot stove. In a split second, the air was full of "cat rockets," launching off the stove in absolute, screaming panic. Spitting and hissing, they tore at full speed over tables, guests, and each other — cruising the walls about three feet off the floor, spreading plaster dust, grease, and hysteria. It was an evening the dinner guests would never forget.

Wallis R. McPherson, who related his first-hand account of the event, chuckled and commented, "If you've never seen a bunch of screaming wild cats going in every direction, you've really missed something in life!"

Wallis's father, Wallis D. McPherson, an engineer and entrepreneur, first came to the Mono basin in 1909, envisioning all sorts of intriguing possibilities. In 1917, he moved onto Paoha Island, in the middle of Mono Lake, homesteading 160 acres there with his family. After researching the area, he entered into a partnership with O.F. Brant of Title Insurance and Trust Company of Los Angeles. Using Brant's money and McPherson's muscle and know-how, the pair made plans to establish a health resort and goat dairy on the island.

The mineral-rich waters of Mono Lake had already acquired a reputation for beneficial effects and an abandoned well on the island produced a ready supply of warm mineral water for therapeutic baths. Goat milk was a popular health food of the day, selling for a hefty $1 per pint. They planned to sell it

in a powdered form, similar to a successful product marketed as "Klim" (milk spelled backwards). The isolation of the island would protect the goats from predators, prevent them from wandering off, and isolate them from diseases carried by other animals.

Property on the western shoreline, the current site of the Mono Inn, was purchased to provide a land base for the island resort. Development plans included a 100-room hotel complex with private baths. The ground floor was to be a shopping mall similar to the one at Hotel Del Coronado in San Diego. The DeChambeau, a ranch above the Mono Inn property was also purchased — horses, stables and all — to provide pack train service for guests who liked to explore. Everything was proceeding as planned when Brant died in 1922.

Brant's family didn't happen to share his enthusiasm for a resort where there was "nothing to do"— no movie houses, no speakeasies, not even any pine trees. In fact, they thought the whole idea was crazy and attempted to claim all the land that Brant had purchased and dissolve the partnership with Wallis R. McPherson. This resulted in a lawsuit that took years to resolve, during the course of which McPherson moved his family to the shore and started to operate the Mono Inn. When the smoke finally cleared, McPherson got the Inn, the Brants wound up with the DeChambeau ranch and Paoha

Preceeding page: The original Mono Inn as it appeared in 1922. The building was constructed on Pahoa Island in Mono Lake.

Top: The Mono Inn as it appears today. The restaurant welcomes weary travelers along Highway 395 who stop to take in the view of Mono Lake near Lee Vining, California.

Author's Note: We are grateful for the good company, hilarious stories and kind assistance from Harry and Barbara Williams, Jack Preston, Wallis R. McPherson, members of the Mono Lake Committee and Jenny at the Bishop Public Library. As Wallis said, "History is what is written about what actually happened," and writing about past events while those who lived it are still around can be a risky business. We apologize in advance for any errors or omissions.

Island was divided between the two families.

While the Mono Inn did grow and prosper, it did not reach the grand scale originally planned for it. The 100-room hotel and shopping mall were never constructed, just the restaurant and bar and a few guest rooms. In 1973, the McPherson family sold the Inn to Russ Columbe who operated it for a decade before selling it to Harry Williams (a ship's engineer from England) and his wife, Barbara, who began a renovation of the quaint restaurant and bar.

The view of Mono Lake enjoyed by guests in the dining room is exceptionally peaceful, capturing the meaning of the Piute word, "mono," which translates as "serene" or "peaceful." The sight of the vast

"The waters of the lake and the springs that feed it have long attracted tourists and health seekers."

blue inland sea, framed by the huge trees just outside the dining room, inspires the imagination to take flight in daydreams — despite ongoing controversy that swirls around the lake and its receding waters.

The waters of the lake and the springs that feed it have long attracted tourists and health-seekers. Mark Twain, in his usual irreverent manner, flipped the facts over in the fry pan of his imagination, coming up with humorous tales about the lake and its water. "Its sluggish waters," he wrote, "are so strong with alkali that if you only dip the most hopelessly soiled garment into it once or twice, and wring it out, it will be found as clean as if it had been through the ablest of washerwomen's hands."

In another story, a delightful product of Twain's "fertile exaggeration," he told of a dog with some unhealed sores jumping out of a boat into the lake. "The alkali water nipped him in all the raw places simultaneously, and he struck

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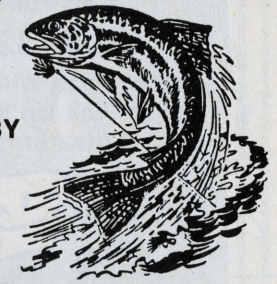

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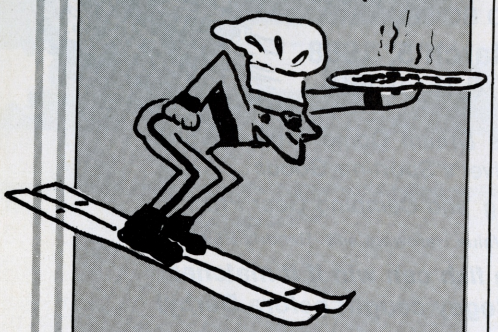

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out for the shore with considerable interest. He yelped and barked and howled as he went — and by the time he got to the shore there was no bark to him — for he had barked the bark all out of his inside, and the alkali water had cleaned the bark all off his outside, and he probably wished he had never embarked in any such enterprise. He was not a demonstrative dog, as a general thing, but rather of a grave and serious turn of mind, and I never saw him take so much interest in anything before. He finally struck out over the mountains, at a gait which we estimated at about 250 miles an hour, and he is going yet. This was about nine years ago. We look for what is left of him along here every day."

Twain's dire tales nonwithstanding, tourists and health seekers *have* bathed in the water to good effect. McPherson tells of the case of a young boy who arrived with a severe case of poison oak he had acquired in Yosemite. He was bandaged up and hadn't slept more than a few minutes at a stretch for some weeks. In three days of bathing about an hour a day, he was all fixed up — blisters and weeping sores gone! Wallis R. McPherson's father (Wallis D.) took advantage of the lake's reputation for natural healing properties by evaporating the water in agitation tanks to produce homogenous crystallization of the salts, which he packaged and sold for $1 per pound.

While Mark Twain's tales may initially have reduced the popularity of bathing in Mono Lake, eventually they came to enhance it. Wallis D., being the entrepreneur that he was, took the popular saying, "Mono Lake, the place made famous by Mark Twain," turned it around and made a sign which read, "Mono Lake, the place that made Mark Twain famous." This brought in quite a few passers-by. Venita McPherson, Wallis D.'s wife, went even further by promoting the Mark Twain Day Celebration, held the first first Sunday in August from 1928 to about 1942. It featured the usual selection of three-legged races, swimming races and rowboat races but added an unusual event — horse swimming. Now most horses *can* swim but not every horse *will* swim. Riders would urge their horses up to the edge of the water and some would actually wade in and swim away from the shore. At any rate, Venita McPherson's genius got plenty of folks into the water.

After a few years, hydroplane races became part of the program, and, in 1940, the Western National Outboard Championships were held at Mono Lake. Silver-plated hardware went to the participants who figured out which propeller pitches and carburetor settings would translate to the top speeds in the dense water and high altitude of Mono Lake.

Besides Mark Twain, other famous people visited Mono Lake — including Wallace Beery, Charles Pickford, and James Russell. They may have had less impact than Mark Twain, but they probably enjoyed themselves more. Special effects for *Fair Wind to Java*, a film starring Fred McMurray and Vera Hruba Ralson, were filmed on Negit Island in 1952. Miniature Javanese villages with Pagoda-type roofs and broomsticks for pilings were erected along the shoreline. Ocotillo plants were brought in by the hundreds and received toupees of plastic fronds to make very convincing palm trees. A volcanic cone was built to stand in for Krakatoa (and to baffle contemporary geologists!) Wallis R. ran boats for the film crew

". . . He was bandaged up and hadn't slept more than a few minutes at a stretch for some weeks. In three days of bathing about an hour a day, he was all fixed up — blisters and weeping sores gone!"

and tried to get them to listen to his advice about dealing with the weather and waves which could unexpectedly hit the lake. They soon got a taste of what the lake could dish out as they headed desperately for shore one night, buffeted by eight-foot waves.

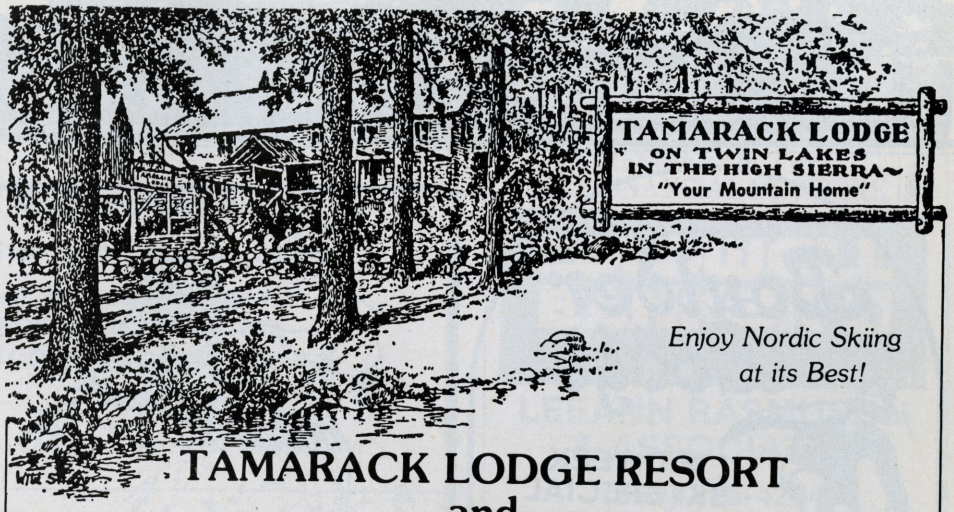
There is a persistent rumor that a President of the United States once stayed at the Mono Inn. Herbert Hoover attended school with Wallis D. McPherson and once rode in the 1937 Buick owned by Wallis R., but apparently the only Hoover to spend time in the guest rooms was a vacuum cleaner. So much for that story!

Other lesser-known people have contributed to the rich lore of the Mono Inn. Andy Downs, the Britisher who developed Boulder Lodge, the first resort on June Lake, stopped at the Inn one day with his two wire-haired terriers. They all took a hike up the hill into the sagebrush, returning shortly with Andy holding an irate rattler, which was buzzing loudly. "I say, what kind of snake is this?" he asked. "It was trying to attack my dogs!" He had apparently captured the reptile with a single, quick grab as he was holding it right behind its head.

"... returning shortly with Andy holding an irate rattler which was buzzing loudly. I say, what kind of snake is this? he asked."

Another often-told tale involves the Chinese cook who didn't know a skunk from a cat. The skunk in question was upsetting cans outside the restaurant, so the cook grabbed a pick and went after it. A quick, practical lesson in zoology ensued. The restaurant closed early that evening and the cook "retired" for a few days to air out.

Then there was Dan Gius, a dark-bearded, handlebar-mustachioed, pipe-smoking prospector and self-taught stone mason from Austria. A well-educated fellow, he was widely suspected of being a "remittance



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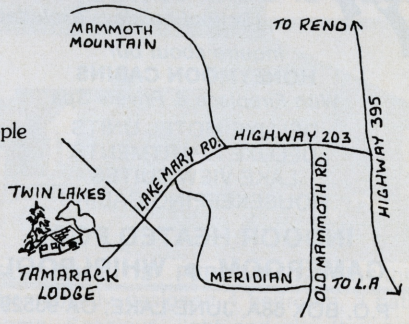

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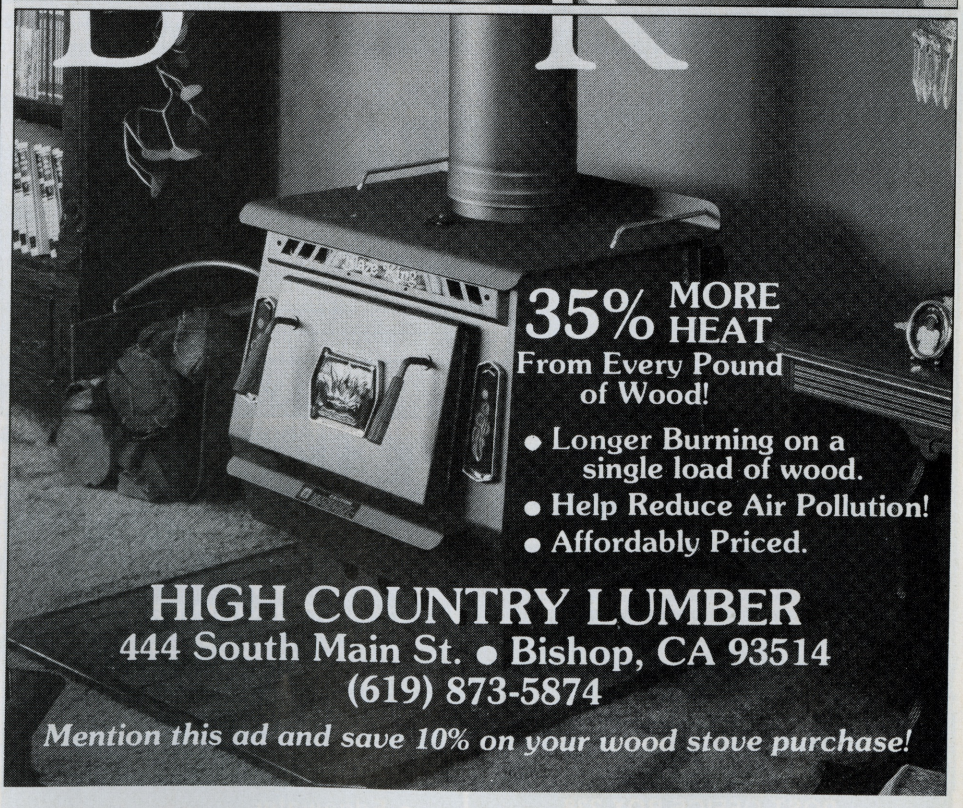

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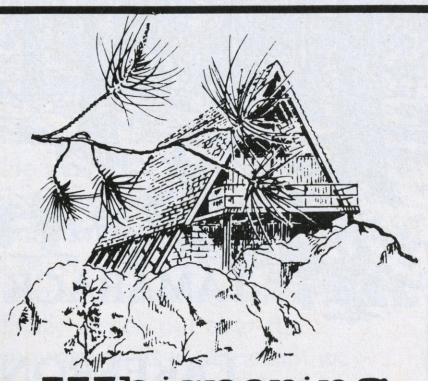

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man," that is the black sheep of the family, sent out of the country and supported by them on the condition he would never return. Dan used to store his prospecting supplies in an old chicken house on the lower part of the Mono Inn property. He kept his dynamite in one corner of the building, blasting caps in the other. One night, four or five of the locals were trying to shoot a porcupine that had raided the garbage cans. They chased the offending creature into the old chicken house. One held a flash light while the others fired their shotguns and six-shooters into the coop. Dan walked up during the barrage and announced, in his German accent, "Ya better not shoot in dere no more. Dere's dynamite in dem boxes!" Everyone headed for the hills.

Not all visitors to the Mono Inn have been as welcome as others. One night a drunken guest stumbled into his room, knocking the gas stove loose from its connection. Gas leaked into the room until it reached the pilot light of the water heater. The explosion was impressive. The man's dog made it to the door before the groggy master, but both escaped unharmed. Fanned by the mountain zephyrs, the resulting flames destroyed four of the Inn's six guest rooms before the Lee Vinning Fire Department arrived.

The French Basque sheepherders who frequented the Inn in the 1950s are remembered as a good bunch. McPherson recalls that one of them had an exceptional talent, playing music with a spoon on bar glasses. His tunes kept the rest of the group dancing late into the night and drew patrons to the bar to watch the sheepherders dance and sing. It was a wonderful cultural experience for the area.

Most of the sheepherders have been replaced by truckers, but the peaceful waters of Mono Lake remain — at least for now. As we sit inside the Mono Inn and watch a full moon rise into a deep purple sky to be reflected on the waters of the lake, we have to wonder if Mark Twain ever saw it on a night like this.

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THE FRONTIER DOWNHILL RACER

by Michael D. Brogan

Sometime back around 1850, a goldminer strapped a pair of barrel staves onto his boots and "skied" down a snowy hillside near what is now La Porte, California. He called these useful items "snowshoes," and went to work improving the way they handled the constantly changing snow of the "Lost Sierra."

He used them for cross-country conveyance, for hunting, and for delivering the mail. They soon supplanted the standard type, known as snowshoes to the rest of the world, and as "webs" to Sierra Mountain folk.

The shape of the snowshoes was gradually flattened out and they came to be carved from scratch out of a variety of native woods, Douglas and Red Fir becoming the eventual favorites. Then, it is said, some Norwegian sailors jumped ship in San Francisco and ran away to the Lost Sierra to search for gold in "them thar hills." Seeing what was happening in the local evolution of the snowshoe, they shared some of their own expertise. While the gold country folk still called them "snowshoes," the addition of this foreign influence led to a new nickname, "Norway skates."

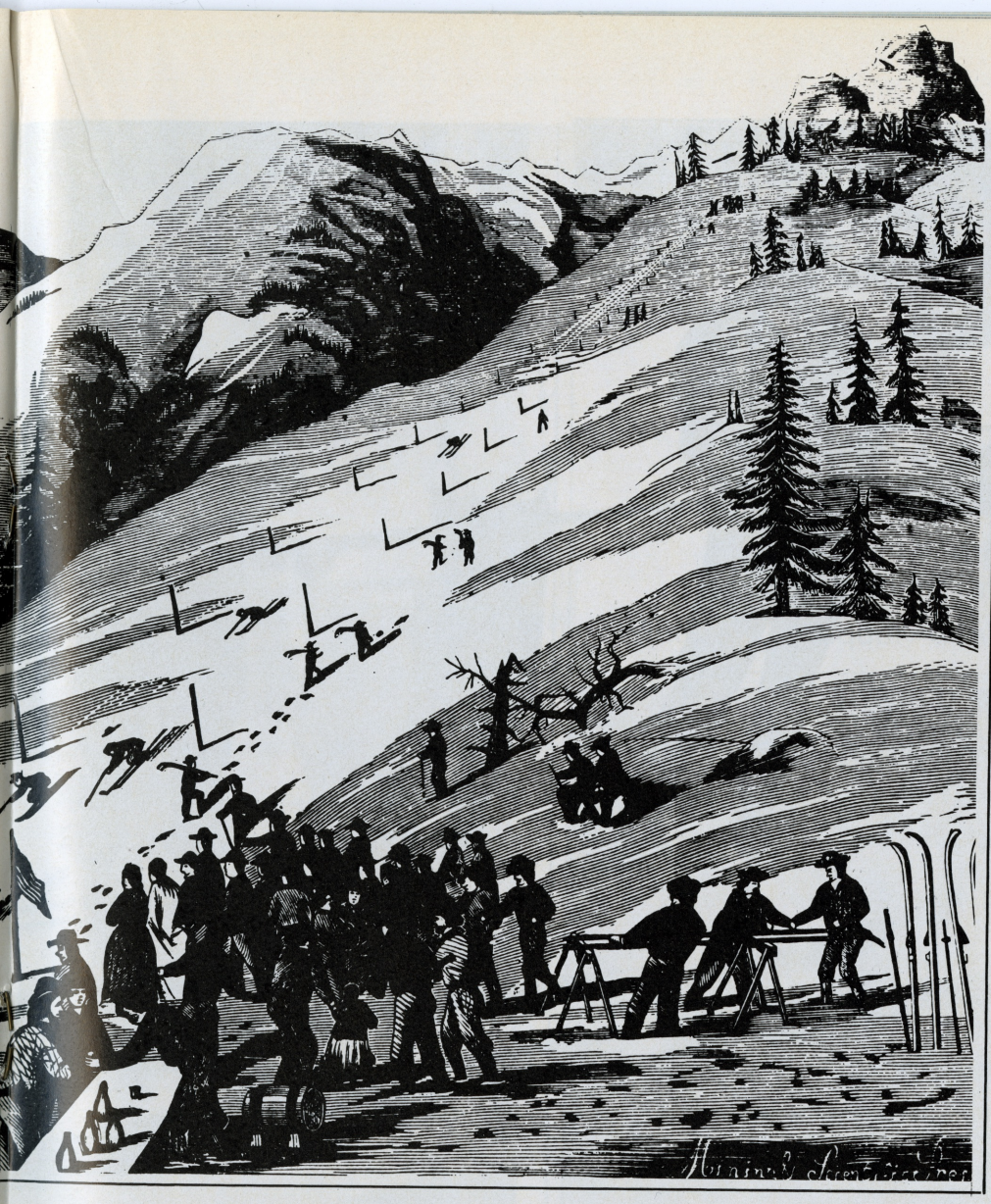
The basic travel design was four to twelve feet long and four to eight and one-half inches wide with no side cut whatsoever. The "binding" was a sturdy rubber band, attached to the sides of the snowshoe and stretched over the toe of the rider's footwear. An alternate binding design used short leather straps, again nailed to the side of the shoe, but laced together over the rider's boot for a "tight" fit.

The snowshoes were about one and one-fourth inches thick in the center and tapered to one-quarter inch at the toe and tail. After a while, a spring curve was built into the design for better toe and tail contact, and a groove, fully an inch wide and three-quarters of an inch deep at the center, was planed out and tapered in depth for the length of the snowshoe's running base. The bases were rubbed with burned tar until they shone like polished mahogany. The tar and the dark color attracted heat when exposed to the sun, very important when the need arose to apply a fresh coat of "dope" (wax) during a long cross-country trek. The tar also hardened, waterproofing the running surface.

Soon the miner would reach a level of expertise on his snowshoes that allowed for a bit of sport now and then. Innovations in the binding system kept the riders on board better at high speed over the rough, unmanicured terrain. A slot was cut across the top of the snowshoe, under the rider's foot in front of where the boot heel would rest when the toe was secured. A block of wood was inserted into this slot. The sole of the boot rested on it as did the front of the boot heel. This kept the rider's foot from swiveling from side to side.

Innovations came and went, but the masters of the hill were the most expert at concocting dope recipes, which were carefully and jealously guarded.

It wasn't long before strictly competitive equipment became the state of the art. By that time, the competitive



snowshoe was a completely different item from the basic travel number. The racer stood on narrower boards, from ten to thirteen feet in length. The regular traveler's dope was a stew of gum, resin, beeswax, sperm candle, and a few other minor ingredients, not boiled but merely melted together, stirred and allowed to harden. A racer's coating, on the other hand, was "lightning dope."

Lightning dope was a complex and variable mixture of ingredients: spermacetti; Burgundy pitch; Canada pitch; balsam of fir, spruce of cedar; Venice turpentine; oil of cedar, pine, hemlock, fir or spruce; tar; glycerine; Barbary tallow; camphor and castor bean oil and a host of other secret and expensive "drugs" known only to the manufacturer. This brew was boiled, stirred and blended with all the care and mystery of the alchemist's amalgam. The variables of the mixture took on a Byzantine complexity with some racers having a different formula for every snow condition, no matter how minor the change. A truly meticulous and expert racer had a different dope for every hour of the day — soft dope for wet snow and gradually harder dopes for icier conditions.

The rider used only one pole. It was about six feet long, about an inch or so thick, and equipped with a "basket" like a doughnut, made of wood and pressed up and around a tapered end, exposing a pointed tip about three inches long. The racer dug this point into the snow in a rowing motion adapted to the racer's own style and geared to getting the racer off to a flying start on the steep, arrow-straight course.

Race meets would usually take about a week to complete and were held on a course called "racetrack." About a mile and a half long, it went straight down the hill with no turns. Four separate parallel lanes were made in the snow from top to bottom. These were the "tracks" on which all the races were run. The racers came off the starting line four at a time, one in each track, at the tap of the drum and drop of a red flag. Races were run in elimination heats till a final race was contested between the winers of the two fastest heats.

The frontier downhill racer reached speeds of over eighty miles per hour on the course. The basic racing position was sort of a sitting squat. Form was subtle; balance, imperative, and timidity, expensive. If a racer wasn't "into the hill" without reservation, he was in danger of losing far more than the race, depending upon what obstacles he encountered while tumbling to a stop.

After passing between the two flags at the bottom of the hill that indicated the finish, he stopped by placing his ski pole between his legs and sitting down on it. If a man lost a "shoe" during a race, but didn't fall, he was still in the running.

Legendary races were held under the aegis of the

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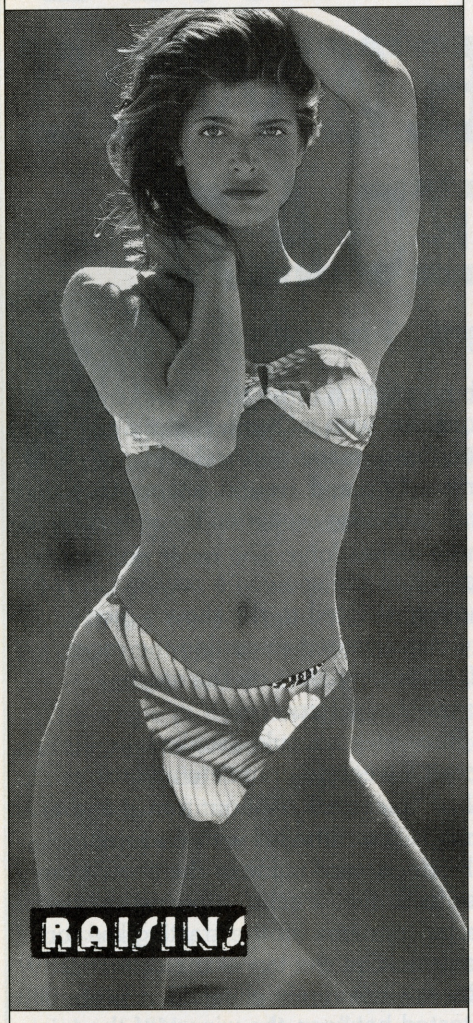

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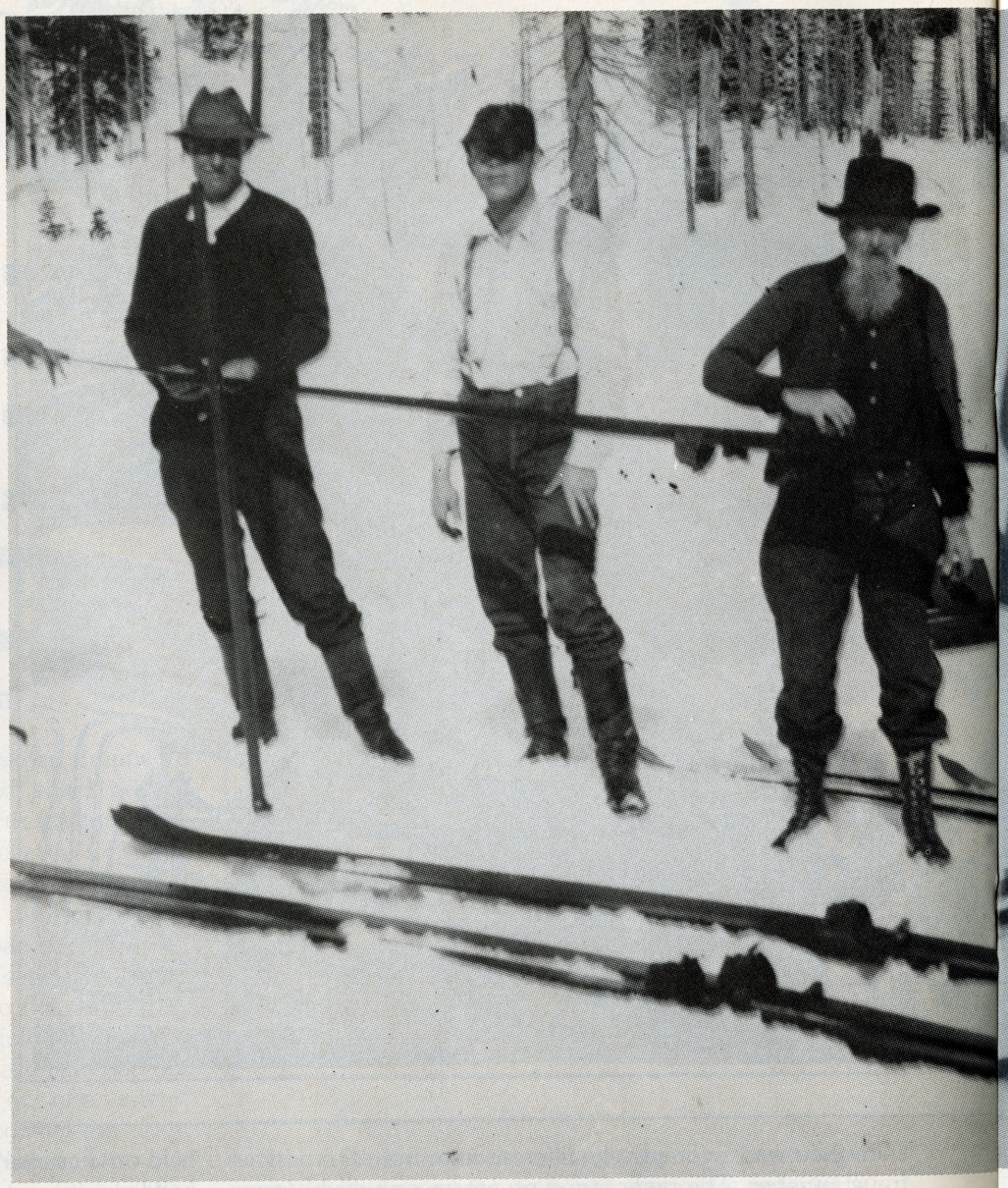

The man in the middle with the box is the "Dopeman." He applied his secret Dope (wax) to the skis of early downhill racers. In 1882 a local miner was clocked at 83 mph which ws the land speed record until this century when a French train traveled faster. Photo circa 1882.

Alturas Snowshoe Club, begun by the Odd Fellows Lodge in La Porte in the late 1850s as the first formal recreational ski club in the world. A second club was formed in Norway soon after. Racers would sometimes trek for 200 miles or more across rough mountains and valleys just to participate in meetings and competitions. "Snowshoe" Thompson, a famous early racer, got his first taste of the race on Lexington hill, right outside La Porte, during on of the Alturas Club's hotly contested meetings. He lost. "Dope is King," posters proclaimed all over town, but Thompson, alas, knew nothing of "Lightning Dope." (See Snowshoe Thompson feature in the July/August 1986 issue of *Sierra Life*.)

As time went by, the annual race meeting took on a broader scope. It became more like a carnival. Races were offered for women and for children as well as for men, and sometimes — after the major races were over — for Chinese. The Chinese were just as serious as the "Melican men" in their intent where racing was concerned, but they weren't as scientific. Mostly they skied on boards discarded in disgust

Western Skisport Museum

by losers in earlier races, and they knew nothing about racing dope.

Records were kept for all the races and cash prizes were awarded to the winners. Betting among the spectators could be furious and not infrequently a miner's entire fortune would be riding on the outcome of a single race. Fistfights and brawls were common at the finish line — between spectators, not the racers.

During the heyday of the competitions, there were no fewer than fourteen saloons in La Porte. Snowshoers would come from far and wide for the meetings, each with his own entourage of betting

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Western Skisport Museum

. . . a look into skiing's past.

Snowshoe Thompson, were he to return to the Sierra today, might sneer at the sight of a pair of brand-new top-of-the-line giant slalom racing skis. The Norwegian immigrant who introduced the sport of downhill skiing to California more than 130 years ago would probably scoff at the skis and cry out, "Short boards!"

Thompson, who gained fame by carrying the mail on skis over snowy paths to isolated Sierra communities, skied on 25-pound oak boards which were four and one-quarter inches wide and no less than ten feet long.

A pair of those gigantic wooden skis dominates the historical displays at the Western America Skisport Museum at Boreal Ridge Winter Park on Interstate 80's Donner Summit.

The chalet-museum displays provide a comprehensive history of the development of ski equipment, ski areas, competition and the factors that have produced today's multi-million dollar industry and the transition from the hardy beginnings of the sport to the era of today's hot-shot skiers.

Seeing the early ski equipment is a must for those with an interest in the rush, spills, skills, and excitement of snow skiing.

"You can imagine a bunch of rowdy old miners sitting in snowbound camps looking for something to do, "says Bill Clark, director of the museum, speculating about the beginnings of skiing in the Sierra.

"We have a lot of good photographs of gold miners skiing, but there is a lack of written accounts of the snowshoe racing," he adds. "Although it was during the period when Mark Twain and Bret Harte were writting about the mining camps, those guys hightailed it to San Francisco when the first snow came, so the races didn't get alot of press."

The museum has been collecting photographs, films and artifacts since it was opened in 1969 by the pioneering Auburn Ski Club. The 59-year-old club leases its property to Boreal Ski Corporation, a funding arrangement which has helped make this museum one of the best skiing archives in the nation.

The club, made up of influential skiing fanatics, also helped advance skiing by helping to form the California Ski Association, and by persuading national officials to hold the first national downhill ski championships in California in 1932.

The history of the club is charted by the museum, along with the heavy metamorphosis of the heavy long boards of the mining camps to the sleek, lightweight skis of today. One exhibit displays skis from the 1924 Olympics side-by-side with a pair used in the 1984 Olympics.

Clark notes that the basic tenets of ski equipment and techniques haven't changed much since the 1930s. The advances made in skiing are mostly in technology and materials," he says. "The shape of a 1930 Northland and a brand-new K2 racing ski are basically the same."

More than 100 films, restored and unrestored, are in the museum's collection — a feature lacking at regional ski museums in Vail, Colorado and Franconia, New Hampshire, and at the National Ski Hall of Fame in Ishpeming, Michigan.

The museum's emphasis on photographs and films is due to the nature of the sport. "When some champion makes a run down a mountain," Clark says, "photographs make the best record. Skiing is so visual."

New exhibits being planned include one on Truckee, California, site of the first ski tow, and one on the history of skiing in the Pacific Northwest.

— Tanya Branson

Western Skisport Museum is located next to Boreal Ski Area on Interstate 80 at Donner Summit. During the winter, it is open from noon to 4 p.m., Tuesday through Friday, and from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Saturday and Sunday. Summer hours are the same, but the museum is closed Mondays and Tuesdays.

These ladies are "doping" their long boards.

supporters. Whiskey was the lubricant of choice and the chaos was overwhelming. The only peaceful, organized place in town was the racetrack itself, regarded with a kind of reverence by competitors and spectators alike.

One incident which illustrates the state of the meets occured when a stately woman, whom no one recognized, appeared on the track for a major and heavily bet race. She started with the others at the top, displaying great skill. When she was first through the poles, the crowd went wild. When the judges called her over to award her the winner's prize, she threw back the hood of her garment and revealed to all that she was . . . a man! All hell broke loose as racers protested and bettors fought over wages.

Western Skisport Museum.

The men who'd raced against "her" complained that they had held back out of politeness for the "lady." "She" was awarded the winner's purse, but in the midst of the riot that followed, a saloonkeeper named Chadwick pushed his way through the crowd and shot the "lady" at pointblank range, killing "her" instantly.

Somehow amidst all the confusion, a sheriff and a judge were "elected" from the rowdy group and a "fair" trail was held before Chadwick was hanged.

In 1882, the "Anti-Debris Law" was passed, effectively ending hydraulic mining in Northern California. It forced all gold mining into the more labor-intensive modes such as open pit, tunnel or drift. Most mining shareholders were from Great Britain, and, as Europe began to drift towards World War I, these investors withdrew their support, selling their stock at a loss.

By 1911, substantial mining had virtually ceased in the La Porte/Gibsonville area, and all but a few of the miners and snowshoers had moved on. The days of the big snowshoe races were over. There were a couple of "exhibition races held during an upsurge of interest in 1948, but the wild and woolly days of the Alturas Snowshoe Club were, sadly, gone. Lexington Hill still invites the adventurous skier, behind the quiet mountain hamlet of La Porte, but it is the cross-country skier who has ultimately inherited the magnificent ski country of the "Lost Sierra" and the legacy of the frontier downhill racer.

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The Great California Grizzly

by Norman McLeod

The grizzly bear, *ursus horribilus*, was very much a part of the California landscape during the early native Indian and Spanish periods of the State's history. It was also numerous during the American occupation but rapidly thinned out to the booms of Yankee rifles. The grizzly roamed the North American continent from Alaska to central Mexico and as far east as the western edges of the Great Plains. It is estimated that at one time there were at least 10,000 of the creatures in California alone.

Referred to as "the beast that walks like a man," the grizzly often rears up on its hind feet for better visibility of possible approaching danger. From this upright position is has been known to close in on hunters in tight quarters, striking out with powerful forearms, with claws that can tear the scalp off a man in one swipe. "Grizzly" Adams, the extraordinary California bear hunter, was attacked suddenly in 1855 by a female grizzly in shoulder-high chaparral. Standing upright, she was ten feet tall. She struck out a Adams and, with a single stroke, peeled his scalp down over his eyes. This felled him, whereupon the bear chewed his hand, neck and shoulders. The fact that his attacker was old, with dulled teeth, saved his life.

The strength of the grizzly is awesome. On the Great Plains these bears experienced little difficulty in subduing the largest bull buffaloes. The California grizzly preyed on bull elk and mule deer, but it's favorite food was the cattle brought to California by the Spaniards.

Acknowledged by the California Indians as "King of the Forest," the grizzly had no real enemies outside of man, with the exception of the mountain lion. McCloud River Indians insisted that the mountain lion always killed the bear when the two fought. The mountain lion, smaller and weaker, would jump on the bear's back and shoulder and then slash its throat. This was confirmed by early white settlers who also witnessed such wilderness encounters.

According to wildlife experts, the size of the California grizzly was from five to seven hundred pounds. In some instances, males reached far greater size, with some weighing as much as 1,500 pounds. One extreme report of a slain bear gave it's weight at a staggering 2,350 pounds.

Most native Indian tribes left the grizzly strictly alone. There were many instances of the bears attacking braves and leaving the men with badly scarred bodies. Not all Indians were reluctant to tangle with the great carnivores.

The people of the Maidu tribe were fond of summer clover and autumn acorns. The grizzly was also fond of these delicacies. When it became obvious that the Maidu should wisely surrender their food supply to a troop of encroaching bears, it was not done before the Indians put up a fight by shooting arrows and throwing spears.

Cahuilla tribesmen tried to ignore the grizzly. But if the a man-killer persisted in disrupting their lives, various

continued on page 44

Photos courtesy of Zoological Society of San Diego

The Greatest Country in the World

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continued from page 43

families united to hunt him down. It was Wailaki custom to get revenge by killing any bear that attacked one of their tribesmen.

Mono Indians were the only natives who evidently made a sport slaying grizzlies. It was their opinion that grizzlies were far easier to kill than black bears. Black bears always looked around apprehensively while eating and were therefore difficult to approach. But a feeding grizzly, holding the Indian in contempt, concentrated wholly on his feast and was vulnerable to ambush.

Perhaps the most effective method the natives used in killing grizzlies was digging pits in the earth under trees. They would hang bait from a branch of the tree and then cover the pit with brush and earth. The unsuspecting bear would smell the bait and then fall into the pit in an attempt to seize it. The bear could then be shot at close range with a barrage of arrows.

The grizzly often played with its toes to attract dinner.

Oddly enough, the Spanish period in California saw the greatest rise in the grizzly population. Though the Spaniards hunted the bears, the grizzlies numbers increased dramatically as the Spaniards cattle herds grew — providing an easy to catch food supply for the bears.

The Spaniards viewed grizzlies hunting as great sport. *Vaqueros*, expert horsemen who were skillful with lariats, liked to surround the grizzly on the open plain. A quartet of Vaqueros would lasso each leg of the bear, rendering it helpless. When it charged one of its tormentors, the other three would hold it in check.

The California grizzly did not adapt well to the more potent weapons of the Spanish newcomers. They continued to be as disdainful of the Spaniards as they were of the Indians. There were, in the State at this time, many well-worn ancient bear paths that grizzlies tended to use, no matter what. If, for example, a new Spanish pueblo were constructed astride its path, the grizzly would not hesitate to stroll through the town, while the townspeople scattered in every direction. The grizzly at such times could not be considered dangerous.

A grizzly bear, if left alone, seldom attacks man. On the other hand it has often been said, "There is no fury on earth like that of a raging grizzly bear." He became a deadly monster only when aggravated, wounded, or suddenly surprised while sleeping. Bears enjoyed resting in thick chaparral and many an unwary hunter found himself face-to-face with an angry bruin—— too close to allow aiming rifles—— with the beast's fearsome jaws snapping and the forearms striking out at him.

Grizzlies had their playful moments. More than one unseen observer witnessed huge bears on their backs on the ground, with all four legs stretched upward, apparently playing with their toes. These may have been rehearsals for bear's antics when decoying cattle to approach within easy reach. Relying on the natural curiosity of bovines, a hungry grizzly would play with his toes until he had a circle of cattle standing around him. All the while, he would be selecting the chiocest beef. Suddenly he would spring to his feet, give chase and, in a short time, would be feasting on fresh beef.

One instance in history illustrates the grizzly's softer side. One day, in a rural area of Los Angeles, a young

Spanish woman went to the spring to wash clothes, leaving her small child unattended.

When she returned she was horrified to see her baby being handled by a giant bear. The monster was on its back and was gently tossing the youngster into the air and catching it again with its huge feet. Then the bear hugged the child tenderly, while the little one screamed with delight. The mother noiselessly made an appearance and the bear, seeing her, nonchalantly waddled off, after safely depositing the toddler on the ground.

The Spaniards brought the infamous bull-and-bear fights to California from Spain and Mexico. Among Spaniards it was a popular sport, a paradox among so gentle a people. Bulls and grizzlies were natural enemies who often fought on the open plains. Bulls were very protective of their harems and would charge a marauding grizzly without hesitation.

Fights between these two creatures were staged in all major settlements of Spanish California. Usually a forty foot square wooden arena was built, surrounded by stands for spectators. Fights were usually featured on holy days, with the excitement beginning immediately after church services.

The wild Spanish bull was a fearsome fighting machine who "will come a mile for his enemy and will as lief charge a hundred men as one." He had been described as "sharp of horn, quick of foot, thick of neck and always ready for a fight, with a charge like that of a catapult." Despite all these attributes, in the arena against a grizzly, he seldom won the battle.

A contest billed as the "Battle of the Century" was staged in Monterrey, Mexico, between a California grizzly and a man-eating lion imported from Africa. It was perhaps the only time in history the two species faced each other. It was no contest. Before many of the spectators were settled into their seats, the battle was over. The big grizzly handled the so-called King of Beasts as a cat would a rat.

Early American in California were amazed by the numerous grizzlies that appeared everywhere. The grizzly is a sociable animal that likes to travel and feed in family groups. Often a clover field or foothill would be covered with them. The grizzly has always been considered "big game," so in this lush environment many early Americans became grizzly bear hunters, acquiring enviable reputations. Some of them boasted of having killed two hundred and more grizzlies in a single year. With this kind of annual slaughter, the eventual demise of the California grizzly was pre-determined. The greatest predator on earth — man — discovered, to his liking, that with careful rifle aim monster bears were quite easily slain. The introduction in the west of the repeating rifle, replacing the single shot muzzle-loaders, signalled the beginning of the end for the California grizzly. By the 20th Century there were only a few left in the entire State.

Perhaps it can truthfully be stated that for centuries before the appearance of Americans in vast numbers, beginning in 1849, the grizzly bear "owned" the territory of California. He was the undisputed king. That he became marked for extinction by man was not so much because he presented a threat to man, but because he simply was there. Today some wildlife experts predict with regret that by the year 2000 no wild grizzlies will remain on the face of the earth.

The last recorded grizzly "kill" in California was in August 1922 at Horse Corral Meadows, Tulare County, at an elevation of 7,500 feet. In 1924 a large hump-backed grizzly was sighted by a road crew in Sequoia National Park, and as late as 1949 grizzly tracks were reportedly seen in Butte and Siskiyou Counties.

The tragedy of the grizzly bear is that unlike the smaller, more elusive black bear, he never learned to fear man. One can say that his arrogance and terrible temper were his undoing in California.

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California's Desert

Wasteland or Wonderland?

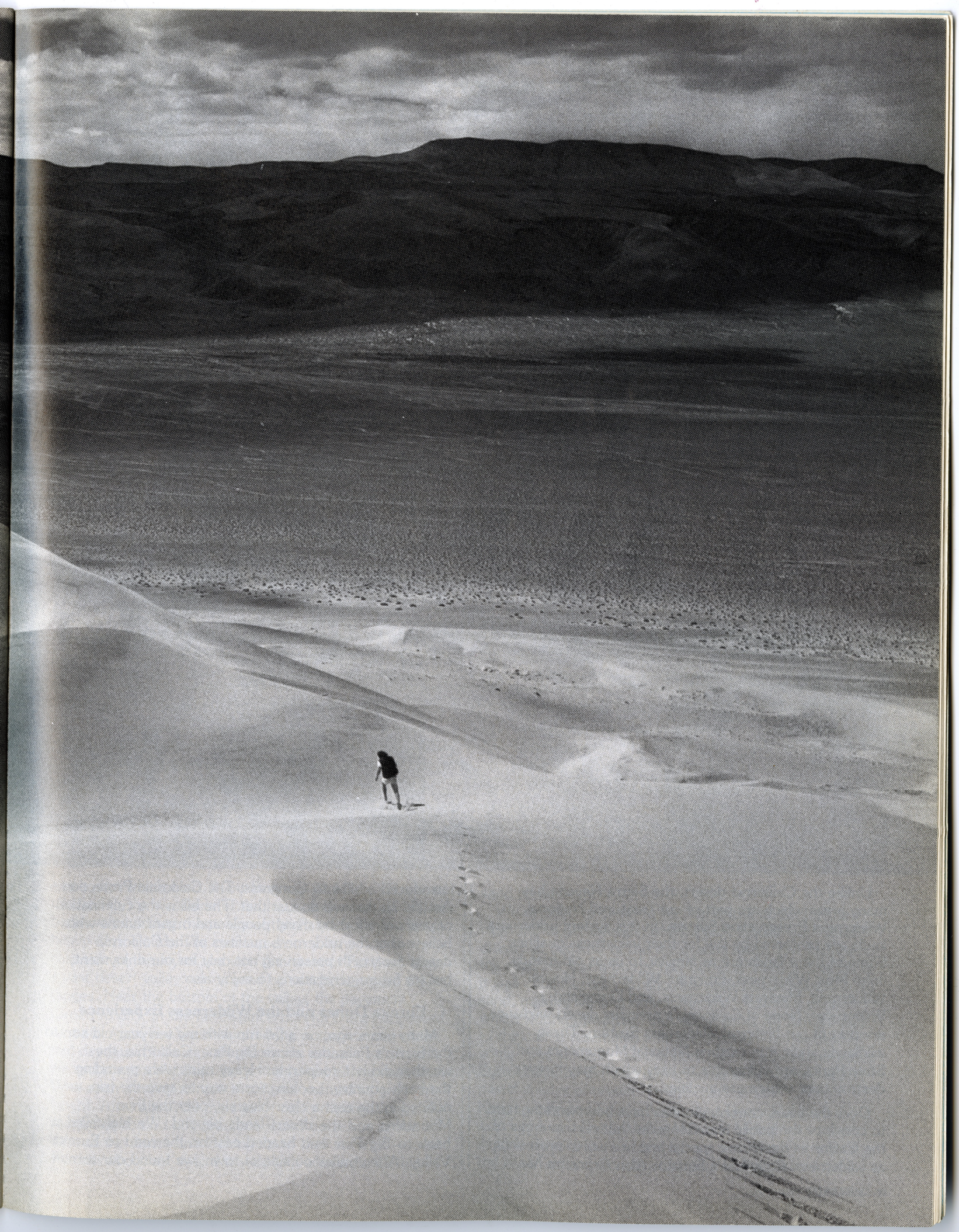
Text and photos by Mike McWherter

"A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man is a visitor who does not remain"

— The Wilderness Act of 1964

Southeast of the Sierra Nevada is a land vastly different in topography, geology and wildlife. This land is the California desert. But, for all the differences between the Sierra Nevada and the California desert — principally due to a lack of water, there is a wilderness quality about the desert that rivals the Sierra.

If I had to choose one word which would describe what it is that brings me back again and again to the Sierra, it would be "wilderness." Be it soaking up the view from some lonely windswept mountain top, marveling at the sight of bighorn sheep against the backdrop of the rugged Eastern Sierra, or listening to the faint song of the Ouzel over the roar of springtime white water tumbling down a rocky creek. Yes, it is wilderness. In desert wilderness our experiences might include sweeping views of dry barren mountain ranges, a road runner scooting across some vast expanse of sand, rock, and creosote bush, or rare desert pupfish swimming in pools of fresh water, immense Joshua tree forests, stretching to the horizon, black and red volcanic cinder cones as big as mountains, castle-like desert buttes rising abruptly out of desert flatlands, miles of sand dunes, a palm tree oasis, and every few years, incredible displays of wildflowers brought on by just the right conditions of winter and spring rains.

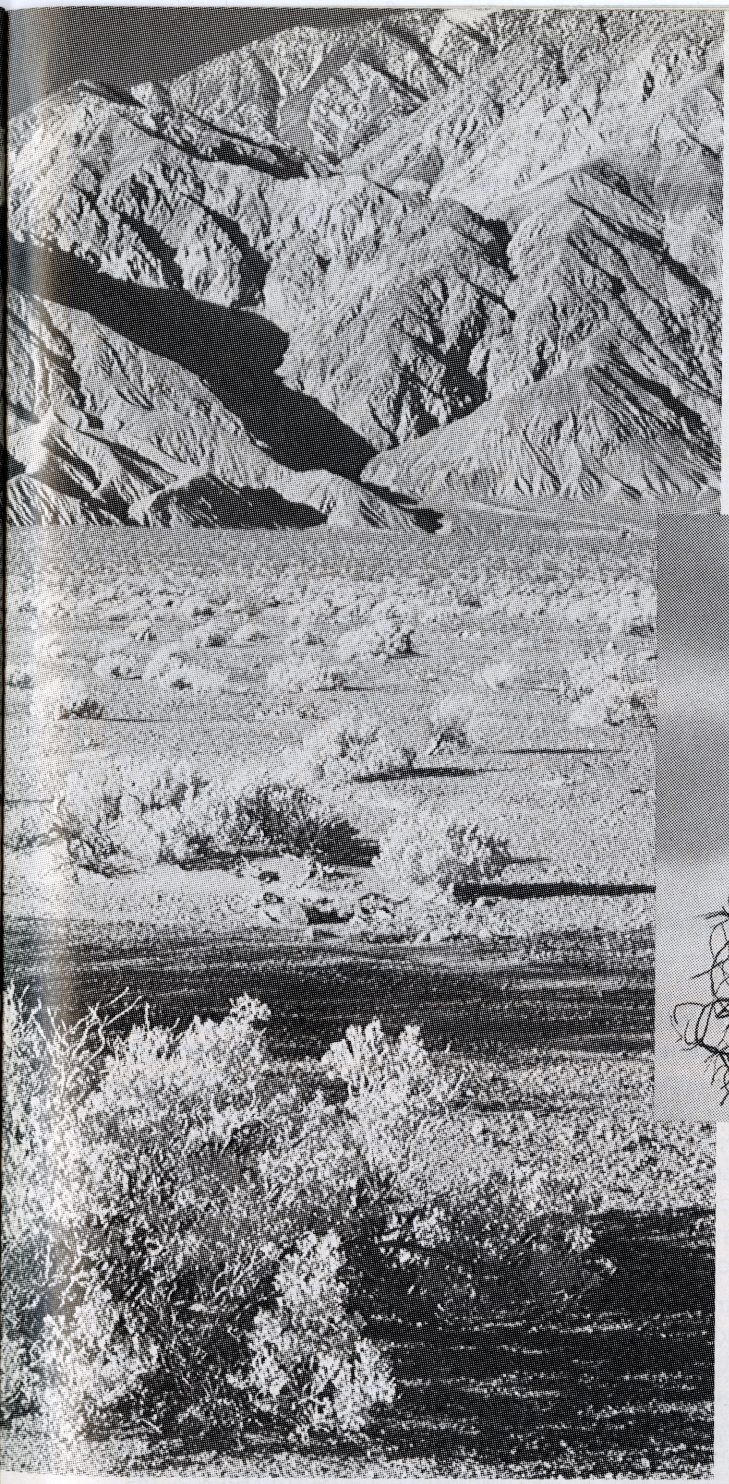


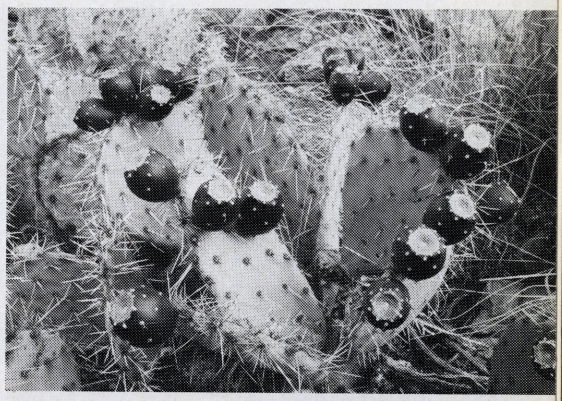
Unlike the California desert, the Sierra Nevada has many areas which are part of our treasured National Wilderness Preservation System. In this system wilderness lands are protected by law for their wilderness qualities. Some of these lands are as familiar to us as old friends: John Muir Wilderness, Emigrant Wilderness, Hoover Wilderness, Minarets Wilderness, and Domeland Wilderness. None of California's precious desert wildlands are part of our National Wilderness System. These wildlands, except in existing National Monuments and State Parks, are vulnerable to uses which may forever destroy their wilderness qualities.

Over the years conservationists have been working hard to convince the public and Congress that certain areas of the California desert are special and are worth preserving as wilderness. California's Senator Alan Cranston has introduced a bill into Congress, The California Protection Act (S. 7), that will do just that. The bill is the culmination of years of effort by many people and organizations who believe that the wilderness qualities of the California desert are worth preserving not only for our enjoyment, but for future generations to enjoy also.

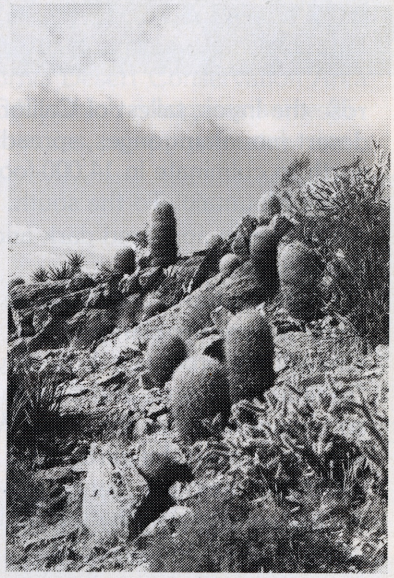
Eureka Dunes and the Wilderness Experience

Many years ago, on a fall trip with my ten-year-old son to the Sierra's Palisades above Big Pine, California, the weather did not cooperate. Heavy rains were pounding the back country. Looking for a way to save the trip, we noticed in the east a clear blue sky over the Inyo Mountains and the desert lands beyond. We hightailed it back to Big Pine and headed east on the road to Eureka Valley. A few miles outside of town, we found our turnoff



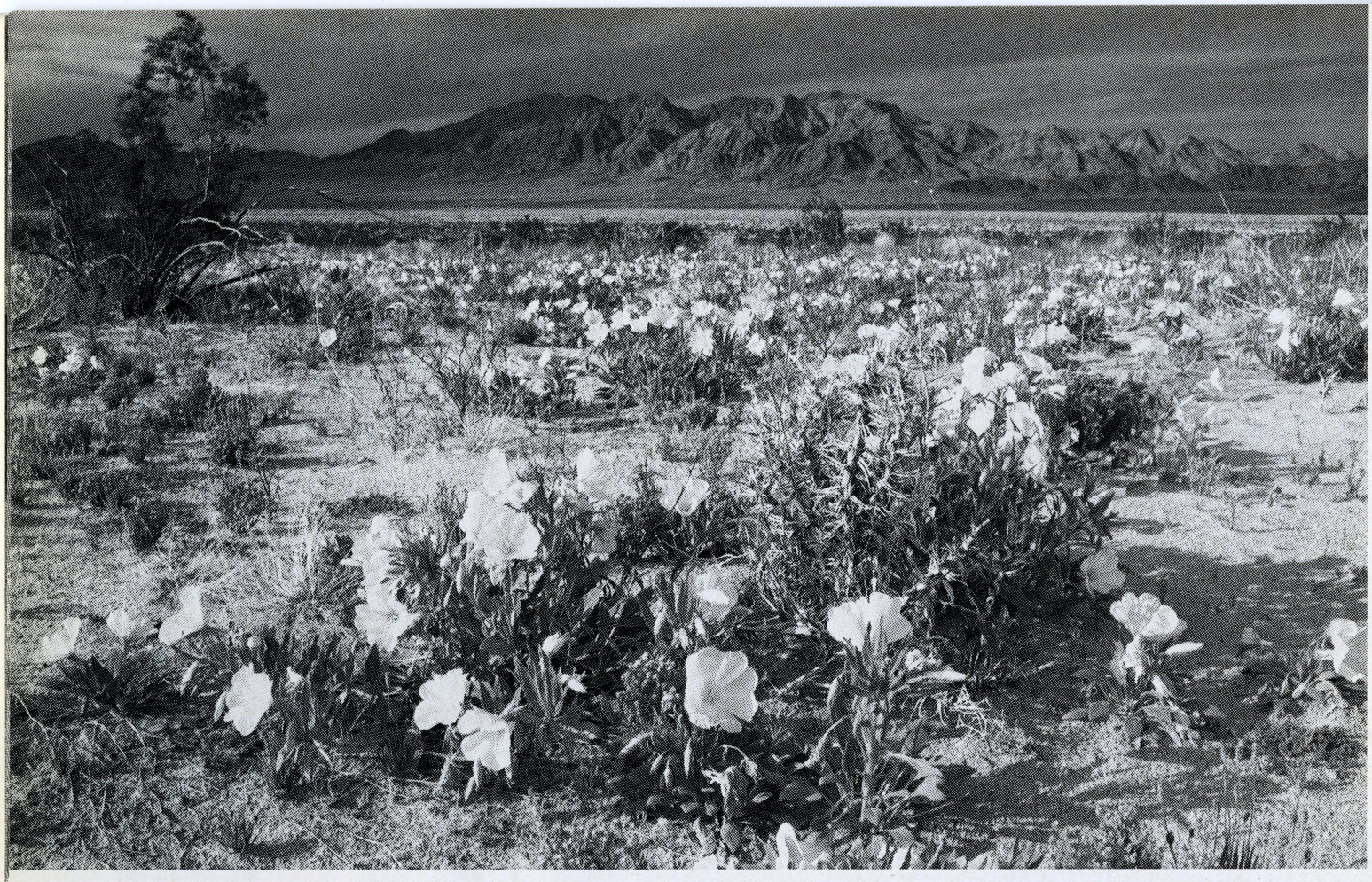


Far Left: Saline Valley, located in Inyo County, provides visitors with sparkling air and breath-taking desert vistas.
Left: The California desert is rich in bird life.
Above: Prickly Pear Cactus ripe with fruit.
Below: Barrel cactus. Part of the unique flora of the proposed Mojave National Park.



and a sign which read "Next Services 72 Miles." The road climbed to the west side of the Inyos and when we looked back we could see the peaks of the Palisades shrouded in heavy dark clouds. We continued our journey down the east side of the Inyos and into the heart of Eureka Valley, a vast desert valley surrounded by parched, rugged desert ranges. Near the bottom of the valley, the pavement turned to dirt. In the far distance Eureka Dunes appeared as a strange white mass shimmering in the warmth of the mid-day sun. Distances are deceptive in the clear desert air and it was difficult to judge the height of the dunes. With each passing minute the dunes seemed to grow in height. After about 30 minutes of teeth rattling along the rough washboard dirt road, we found ourselves at the base of the dunes and looking up to their summit — over 500 feet above us — and wondering: where did all this sand come from?

We decided to climb to the top of the dunes for the view and to get a feeling of their size. Shoes were soon discarded because of the the grating sand. The surface of the sand felt warm on my feet but only a few inches down it was cool. Recent rain showers had compacted the sand, making walking on it easy. We followed a ridge which wound upwards. After some effort we looked back to the car. It resembled a little toy parked at the base of some huge sandpile. To the north stretched Eureka Valley Surrounded by dry and barren mountains colored in soft pastel shades of brown. To the east the Last Chance Range separated Eureka Valley and Death Valley. I wondered why Death Valley National Monument did not include Eureka Dunes for they are as sublime as any of the other natural wonders of Death Valley. To the west



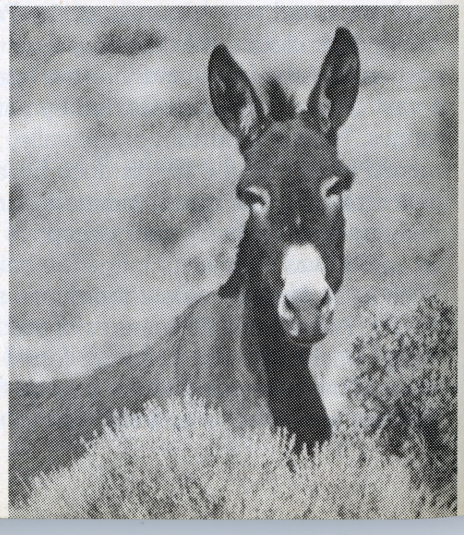
rose the Inyos, tallest of California's desert mountain ranges, spreading north to culminate in 14,000-foot White Mountain. To the south, the Saline Range appeared dark and mysterious.

From the top of the dune we saw a land where the clarity of the atmosphere produces those daytime "see-forever" views and a night sky so transparent that the Milky Way seems to touch the earth. And the wonderful supreme silence, occasionally broken by the rattling of wind-born sand particles bouncing up and over the dune and a crackling sound caused by sand particles striking some dry dune grass — nature's music in an otherwise silent world. At the top of the dune the ridge dropped away, curving gently as it lost elevation in its journey southward. I took a deep breath of fresh air. Senses were alert from the exertion of the climb. Everywhere there was an ambience of peace.

I thought how important it is to me to be able to come to places like Eureka Dunes where one can find this wilderness quality. I wonder if in the future others will be able to come here and find the same peace. Whether or not such an opportunity to experience this feeling will even exist for them will depend upon what we do today to assure that Eureka Dunes and other special wildlands in the California desert retain their wilderness qualities.

And what about future generations? Is this kind of wilderness experience worth saving for them? Will they even value such things? Wilderness advocate and writer Wallace Stegner wrote "Something will have gone out of us as people if we ever let the remaining wilderness be destroyed . . . if we pollute the last clean air and dirty the last clean streams and push our paved roads through the last of the silence."

I believe that there must be places where we can go where nature's works dominate. We need places where we can experience a reunion with nature, where nature's energy can revitalize spirits tired from the sight of concrete and asphalt, the sound of engine noise, the smell of combustion. There is something almost religious about experiencing wilderness. Perhaps it is nature in the purest form we can find it, as yet undisturbed by man. John Muir was undoubtedly describing this feeling about wilderness when he wrote: "Climb the mountains and get their good tidings. Nature's peace will flow into you as sunshine flows into trees. The winds will blow their own freshness into you, and the storms their energy, while cares will drop like autumn leaves." Although he was probably writing about the wilderness experience in places like the Sierra Nevada, his words apply equally well to our desert wildlands.



Saline Valley and More

Eureka Dunes was not my last desert wilderness experience. In the years that followed I discovered for myself many of the other special wildlands of the California desert. One result was the demise of the undercarrige of my car, and the other was a greater appreciation for desert wilderness. For example, south of Eureka Dunes is Saline Valley which has other dunes, not as high as Eureka Dunes, but wide and low, with white sand that gives them an almost snow-like appearance from a distance. West of the dunes, in the Inyo Mountains, rise New York Butte and Mount Keynot, often dusted in winter snow. A dirt road traverses Saline Valley from north to south. The southern approach climbs to a pass which has a dramatic view of the Panamint Valley to the north. Below can be seen the Panamint Dunes — another very special place. But what you can't see, even from this sweeping view, is the millions more acres of California's desert wildlands to be found as one moves southeast through the great Mojave desert and toward the border with Mexico. After many years of traveling over these desert wildlands, I have found them to be far from wastelands but, instead, to be one of the most scenic and diverse desert wonderlands anywhere in the world.

Facing Page: Desert wild flowers of the Sheephole Mountains.

The desert burro has been the center of controversy in recent years.

Below: Clark Mountain, highest mountain in the Mojave desert.

The Proposed Mojave National Park

One of the many beautiful areas in the California desert which warrants special attention is the proposed Mojave National Park. This area lies in the triangle between Interstate 10 and 40, Barstow and the Nevada border (see map). There one can see the magnificent Kelso Dunes — which equal Eureka Dunes in height. Nearby is the largest Joshua Tree forest in the world. Clark Mountain, at 7,929 feet, is the highest peak in the Mojave desert. Thirty-two volcanic cinder cones give the landscape the look of the Moon. There are also petroglyphs, pictographs, Indian sites, Indian trails, the Mojave Road, abandoned army forts and posts, abandoned mines, ghost towns, abandoned railroads, and the Kelso Depot, a magnificent two-story railroad depot built in 1924. Largely due to the efforts of a group called Citizens For Mojave National Park, the government agency that administers these lands, the Bureau of Land Management, declared the area as a National Scenic Area and has called it the "Gem of the California Desert." Peter Burk, President of Citizens For Mojave National Park, has spearheaded the movement to establish a Mojave National Park since 1976. Members volunteer their time and provide speakers, slideshows, outings, and publish books and pamphlets about the importance of a Mojave National Park.

The BLM, CDCA & Desert Plan

In 1976, Congress established the California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA), which comprises some 25 million acres, or approximately one

fourth of California's land surface (see map). About 12.1 million acres are public lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), an agency of the Department of the Interior. The management of the 12.1 million acres of BLM desert lands is outlined in a large BLM document, the Desert Plan. Congress established the CDCA with the goal of providing "for the immediate and future protection and administration of the public lands in the California desert within a framework of a program of multiple-use and sustained yield, and for the maintenance of environmental quality." The public lands are managed for the multiple uses of timber, minerals, livestock grazing, wildlife, watershed, wilderness, and recreation. Congress noted that the California desert was rich in natural, cultural and economic resources and that these resources were "uniquely located almost adjacent to an area of large population."

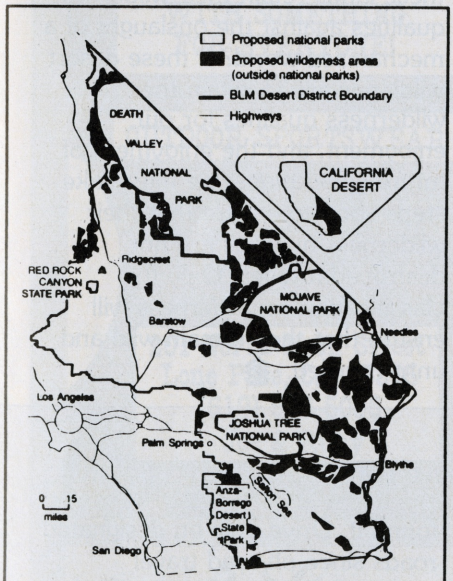
The BLM was required to identify all existing wilderness areas in the CDCA so that Congress would be able to decide which lands should receive permanent protection. Within the CDCA the BLM determined that 137 different areas, totaling 5.7 million acres, had wilderness characteristics. A significant decision made by the BLM in the Desert Plan was the recommendation that 2.1 million acres of the CDCA be considered for inclusion into the National Wilderness Preservation System. The BLM sends its recommendations to the President, who sends his recommendations to the Congress for final action. Only Congress can designate an area as wilderness.

Wilderness Bills

The California Desert Protection Act came about as a response to a need for new management for the California desert. Conservationists felt that under the current administration the BLM and the President would recommend too little wilderness to Congress. The California Protection Act, first introduced as S. 2061 in 1986, and reintroduced in January of 1987 as S 7, will designate some 4.5 million aces as wilderness. Boundaries have been drawn to exclude areas of particular importance for mining and off-road vehicle recreation. The bill will upgrade Death Valley National Monument to National Park status and add to the park 1.3 million acres to include such areas as Saline Valley, Eureka Valley and Hunter Mountain. A new Mojave National Park of 1.5 million acres will protect ecosystems not yet represented in the National Park System. Joshua Tree National Monument will gain National Park status and be expanded to include such key areas as the Coxcomb, Eagle and Little San Bernardino Mountains. Some 20,500 acres of BLM lands will be transferred to the State of California to round out Red Rock Canyon. An identical bill, H.R. 371, has been introduced into the House of Representatives by Representative Mel Levine. Representative Richard Lehman has introduced similar bills, a park bill, and a BLM wilderness bill (H.R. 361 and H.R. 729).

Judy Anderson of the California Desert Protection League and Jim

Dodson of the Sierra Club are leaders in the conservation movement to protect the California desert. They, along with many other dedicated people in other conservation organizations, have worked long and hard on desert issues from wilderness to helping draft the Cranston bill. In Dodson's words: "The importance of this bill compares with such landmark efforts as John Muir's campaign to save California's giant Sequoias more than 90 years ago. California has one of the country's largest and most pristine areas of desert wilderness in its backyard. That kind of precious resource must be carefully preserved for future generations. We will join Senator Cranston in fighting as long as it takes to save this unique desert ecosystem. Without this Cranston initiative, the California desert may fall victim to a small, but extremely destructive group of off-road vehicle users who are capable of ruining forever one of the nation's largest natural expanses of desert wildlands." Anderson expressed her



California Desert Protection Act Proposals

Above: Proposed California Desert area.
Facing Page: Barrel cactus in Saline Valley.

delight about the introduction of the bill this year: "We are very excited about the early introduction. It means that the Senator is very serious about getting hearings scheduled this year, and that it is

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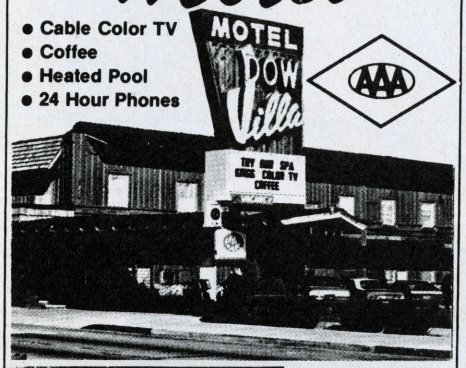

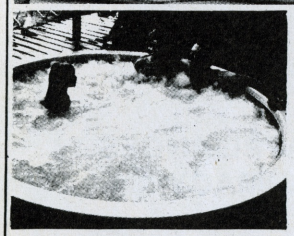

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Above: Telescope Peak, highest Peak in Death Valley as seen from Panamint Valley.

the priority environmental legislation on his list for this session of Congress." In Senator Cranston's words: "Clearly, the California Protection Act is a comprehensive and complex piece of legislation. It reflects the hopes of a broad range of people. I'm committed to doing everything I can to see they get their reward — permanent protection of their beloved desert."

Some of this nation's most pristine desert wildlands lie southwest of the Sierra Nevada. These desert wildlands are every bit as much wilderness as that we all know in the Sierra. The crucial difference is that the wildlands of the Sierra have statutory protection as part of our National Wilderness System and their future is secure. Our desert wildlands do not currently enjoy this protection. Without the official protection of wilderness status, how long can these lands retain their wilderness qualities against the onslaught of a mechanized world? If these desert wildlands are to retain their wilderness qualities for our enjoyment, and the enjoyment of future generations, we must take steps soon to ensure that their wilderness qualities are not destroyed forever. Only the classification as wilderness will ensure that they remain wild and untrammeled.

Hints on Desert Travel

The best months for visiting the California desert are the cooler months, from November to April. Bring enough water (at least 1 gallon a day for each person). When traveling to remote areas, consider taking another vehicle in case one vehicle breaks down. Leave an itinerary with someone back home with your expected return time. Leave the desert cleaner than you found it. Drive only on designated roads since off-road travel permanently damages the fragile surface of the desert. Respect the fragile nature of the desert and its ecosystems. Cherish the beauty. Remember, others will soon be along to marvel and make the same discoveries that brought you there — and that will surely bring you back.

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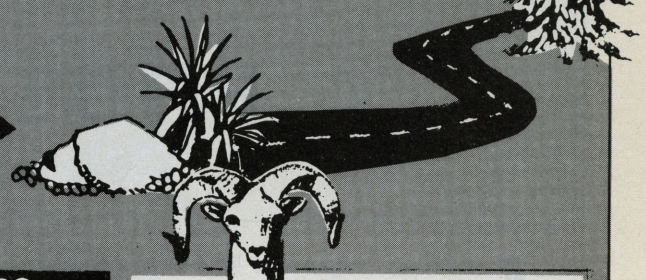

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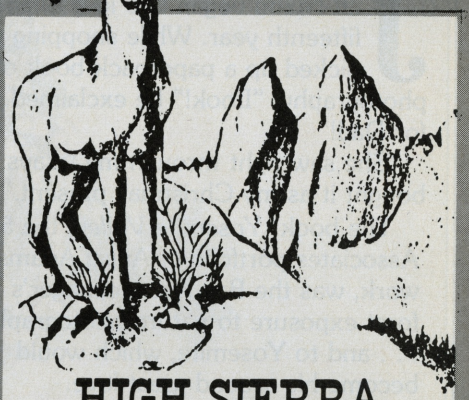

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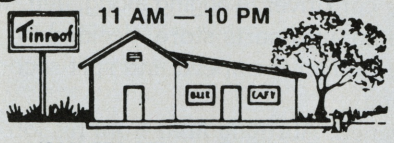

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PORTRAIT OF A PHOTOGRAPHER

by Christian Kallen

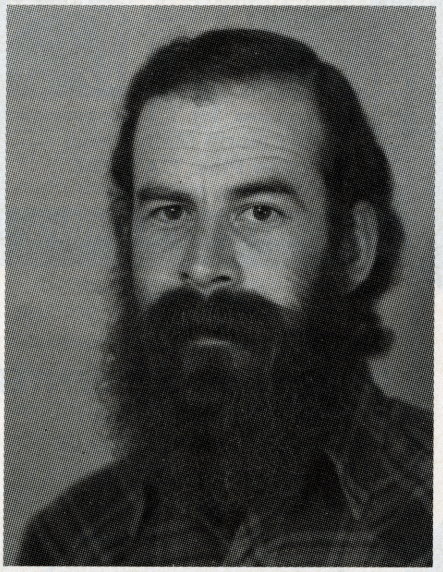
Jeff Nixon began two love affairs the Christmas of his fifteenth year. While shopping with his mother, he picked up a paperback book of black-and-white photography. "Look!" he exclaimed. "Let's get this for Dad!"

"She saw right through me," says Nixon today, "and bought it as my Christmas present."

The book, *Yosemite Valley*, the 5 Associates portfolio of Ansel Adams' work, was the Bay Area teenager's forst exposure to nature photography . . . and to Yosemite, which would become his second great love.

Today, 35-year-old Jeff Nixon's photography has come into its own, and his name is high on the list of Adams' "disciples" — those who worked with the master of natural landscape photography.

Consider Nixon's photograph of a stand of lodgepole pines reflected in the waters of a river, taken in 1985 on a trek to the Lyell Fork region of Yosemite National Park, the area crowned by the craggy, 11,000-foot peak that was named "Mt. Ansel Adams" following the photographer's death.



Jeff Nixon

"When I was working at the Ansel Adams Galley, Ansel would always ask me if I'd been up the Lyell Fork yet. Finally, I got the chance, and it was such an incredible place — a wealth of natural contrasts, a great place for photography."

"I saw these trees growing among some rocks, and it occured to me that they looked familiar. Finally I decided that they might have been photographed earlier by Ansel, so I took one shot of them. When I worked up the print and looked into Adams' portfolio, I was amazed."

There are two things that are amazing about this shot. First is the visible identity of the scene, as shot in 1985 by Nixon and 64 years earlier by Adams. The rocks next to the pond are the same. So, almost incredibly, are the trees — some a bit thicker, one white with death, and another fallen in the same place another fallen tree reclined six decades earlier.

"You tend to think that things change in nature, over harsh winters and through windstorms. Well, they do, but not that fast."

The other striking thing about the two photos, Nixon's and Adams', is that both are masterful. The eye of each artist has isolated the heart of the scene: the ascent of the white trunks reflected in the shallow pool in the foreground. Both have captured the spirit of the place, its repose as well as its inherent tensions.

The shots are not identical. There is no sense of slaving motion, of mimickry or mockery: there is just the eye of excellence.

Although the fateful Christmas present did inspire Nixon to drag his family to the Yosemite Valley the next summer, thoughts of a life in the wilds were still far from his mind.

Nor did he consciously decide to emulate the work of Ansel Adams. He did not, in fact, set out to be a photographer. His first love was cars. His father was a machinist and race car driver. Tagging along, Jeff, who earned his living in an auto parts store, decided to attempt to capture on film the speed and split-second action of auto racing.

Then fate intervened. Abruptly fired from his job ("I still don't know why," he says), he was left with no prospects — and a brand new 1972 BMW 2002 TII sedan on which

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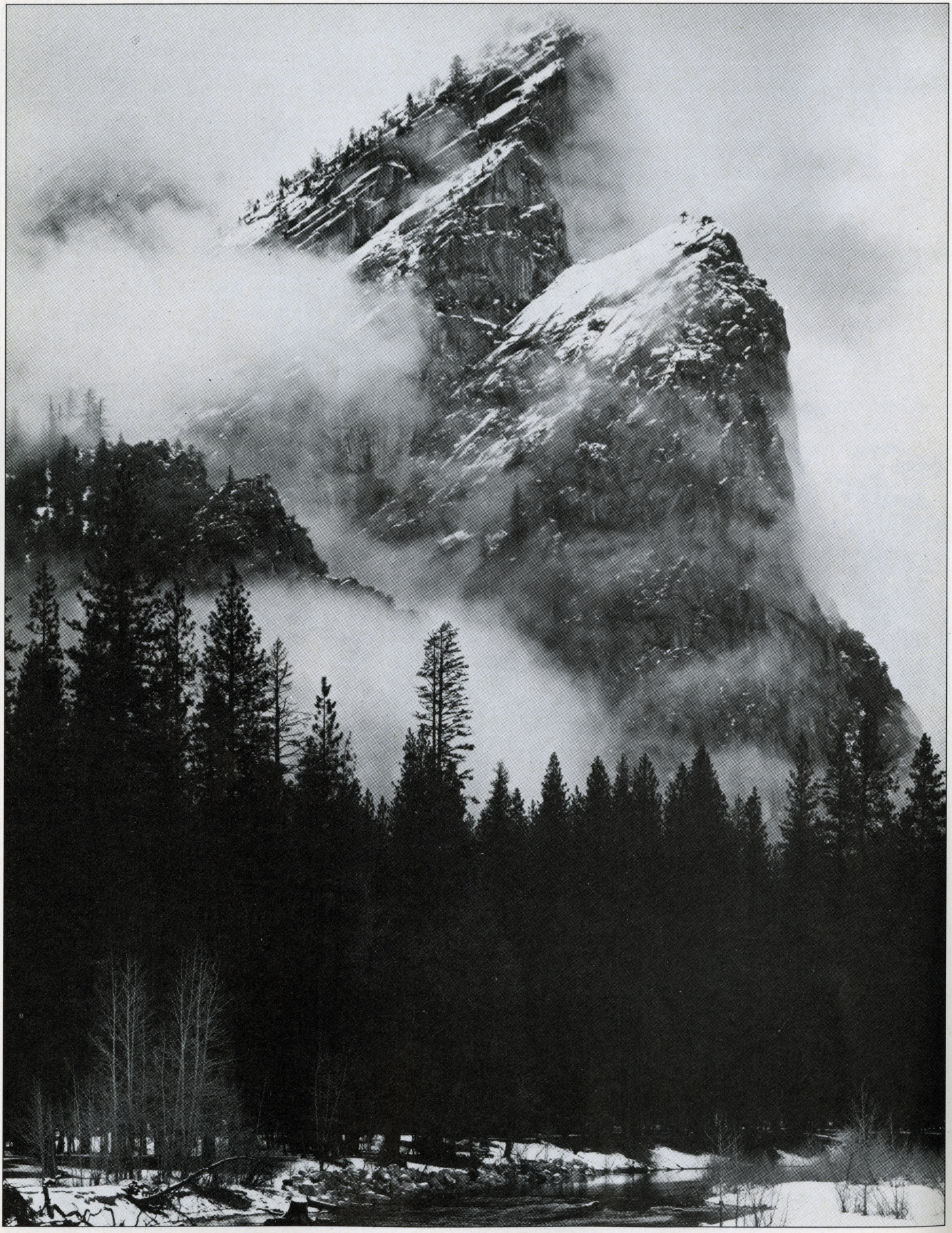

The photography of Jeff Nixon shares the artistry of his mentor, Ansel Adams, without mimicry or mockery of the master photographer's style.

he had yet to make his first payment. He needed a job. As there was nothing holding him to the Bay Area, he applied for a job in Yosemite Valley.

By day, he worked for the Curry Company — the concessionnaire that operates virtually everything in the park except the waterfalls. In his spare time, he took photographs and immersed himself in the lore of Yosemite as recorded in the writings of John Muir (with whom he shares an April 21 birthdate) and the photography of Adams.

After two years, his developing photographic talents, coupled with his by-now intimate familiarity with the park, landed Nixon a job at the Ansel Adams Gallery.

The gallery, a park institution since its 1902 formation as "Best Studios," is the oldest family-owned concession in the National Parks system. Its current appellation reflects the continuity of the family tradition: Virginia Adams, the widow of Ansel Adams is the daughter of the gallery's founder, Harry Cassie Best.

The elegant two-room gallery is meticulously maintained, showcasing changing shows of the works of guest photographers and a permanent display of some half-dozen Ansel Adams prints of the Valley's landmarks.

Ansel and Virginia Adams were very open people, always hospitable to friends and strangers alike. "Five o'clock was open house at the Adams place," recalls Nixon, who was a frequent guest.

The atmosphere there had its effect, like the nurturing humidity of an orchid house. "I was surrounded by the books, the prints, the personal effects, the *vibes* of Ansel Adams — and of Yosemite," he says. As his photography improved and his commitment to the craft increased, inevitably, his tolerance for everything else declined.

"I just burned out on selling 110 film," he says. In 1978, despite having worked his way up onto the instructor's list of the highly regarded Gallery Workshops — Jeff left Yosemite Valley. For four years he lived in Sonora, a beautiful Sierra foothill town two hours drive from the Valley floor, and returned to selling car parts to earn his living. Still, he kept his "glorified hobby" alive, continuing his own photography and offering photo workshops on his own. It was as if the first stage of his career, apprenticeship with the master, had ended, and the second, journeyman photographer, had begun.

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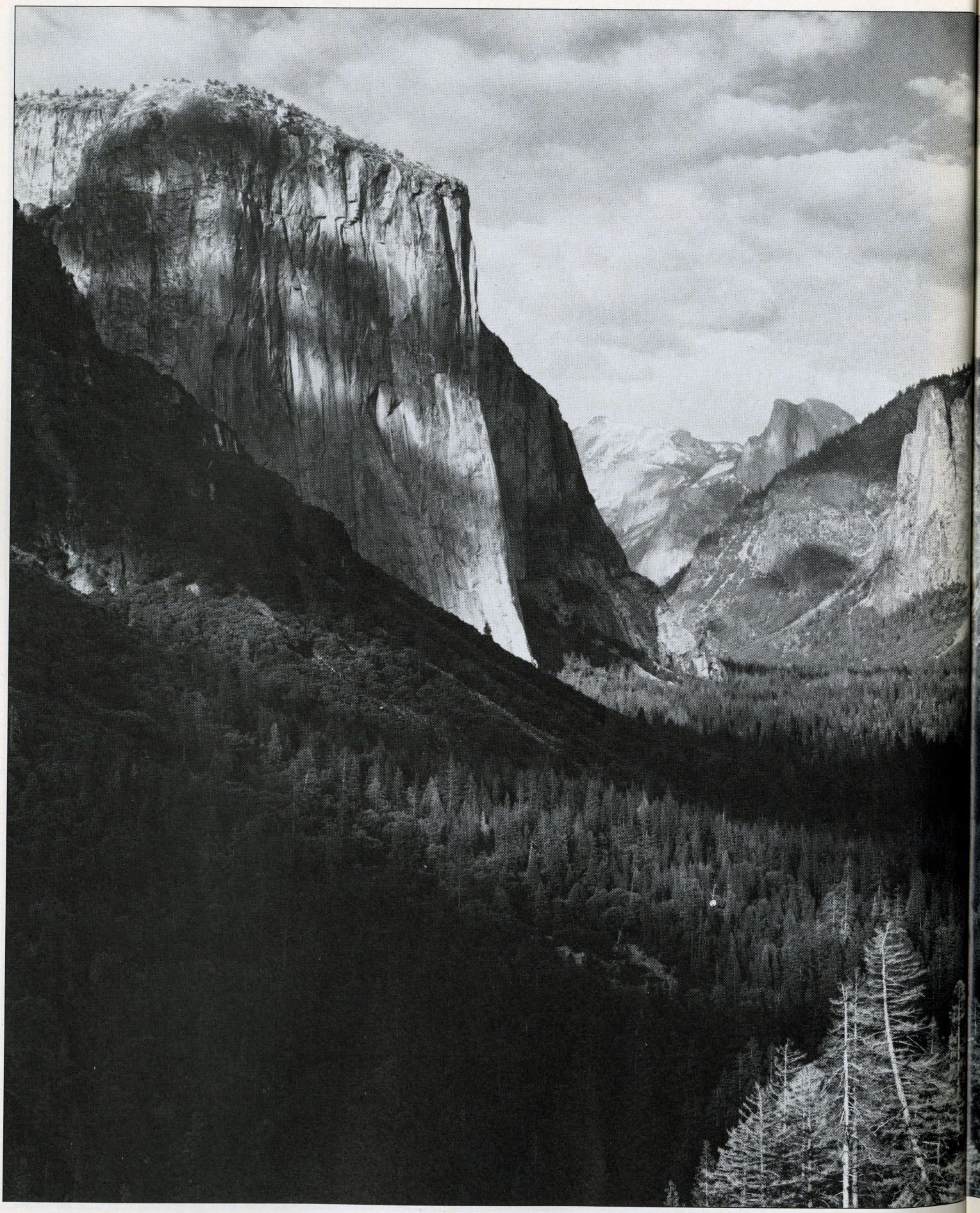
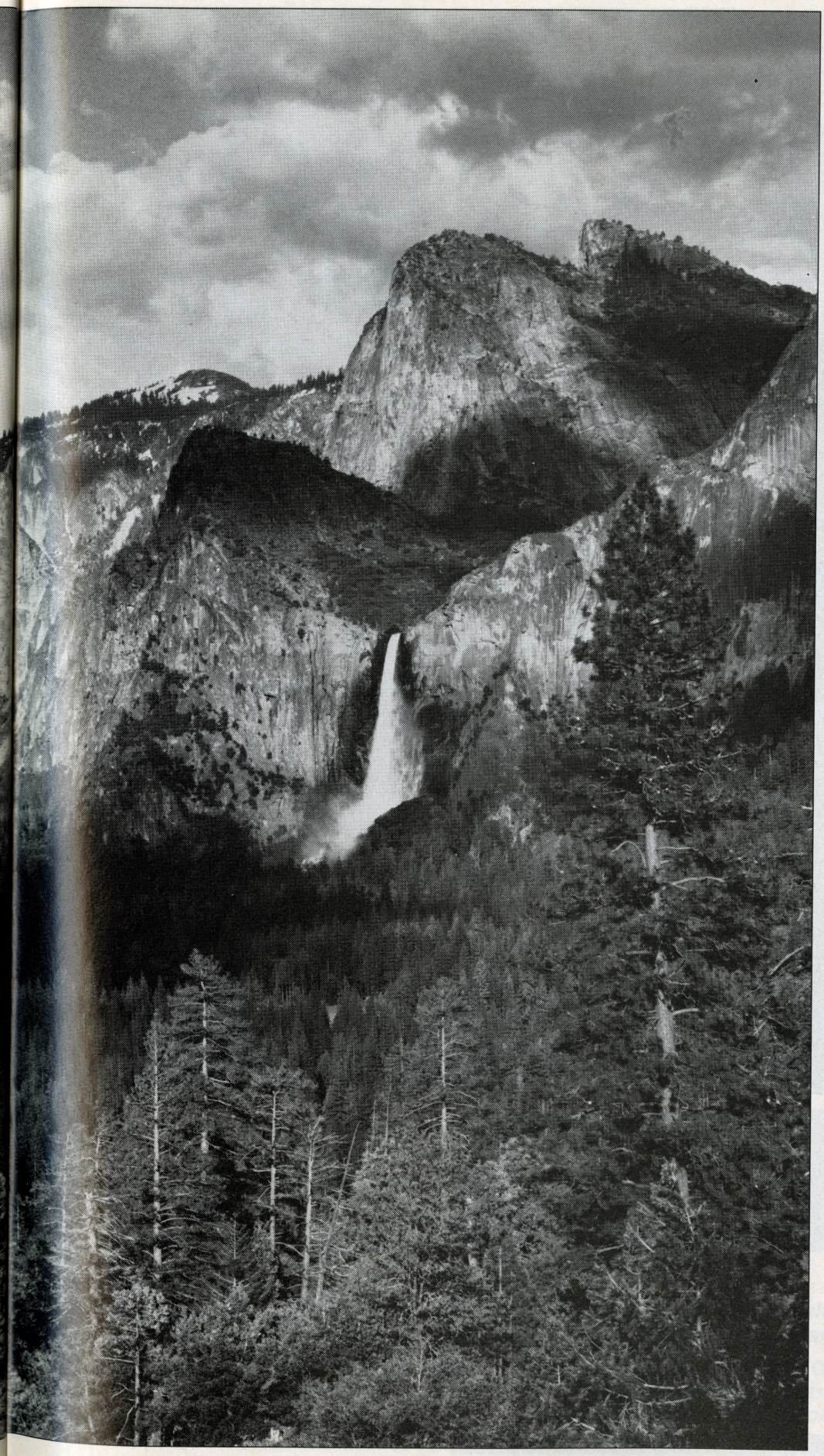




The next step, however — from journeyman to master — is a giant one, and, in 1982, Nixon found himself returning to the Ansel Adams Gallery, drawn again by its camaraderie and the natural wonderland of Yosemite.

By then, Adams himself rarely came to the Park anymore, although he would call in from his Carmel home. "This is Ansel . . . What's going on over there? How's the weather? Clouds? What kind of clouds?"

When Ansel Adams died on Easter Sunday, 1984, Nixon knew his life had to change. He had lived in Yosemite for eight and one-half of the previous twelve years.

He, once again, left Yosemite for Sonora, offering series of photography workshops in Yosemite and elsewhere in the Sierra. These workshops became the springboard for Nixon's recent move to his own studio, 800 square feet in a professional building just outside Sonora, shared with a writer, a designer and typesetter, and an artist.

From this base, he teaches photography for Columbia Community College, continues to offer workshops (once a month, usually coinciding with the full moon) and works in his darkroom.

Of the workshops, Nixon says, "They're a source of money, sure, but more than that, they are in the spirit of photography . . . and of Ansel Adams. He used to say, 'Ask me anything, *anything at all.*' Well, I try to have that same attitude."

Indeed, Nixon's approach to photography is so strongly influenced by Ansel Adams that many casual observers mistake the disciple's work for that of the master. "I take it as a compliment," he says. "I don't have any great need to make a personal statement through my photography. Adams believed in photography as a positive, active force in bringing the natural world before the eyes of the public. That's a high enough goal for me."

There are, of course, differences between the two photographers,

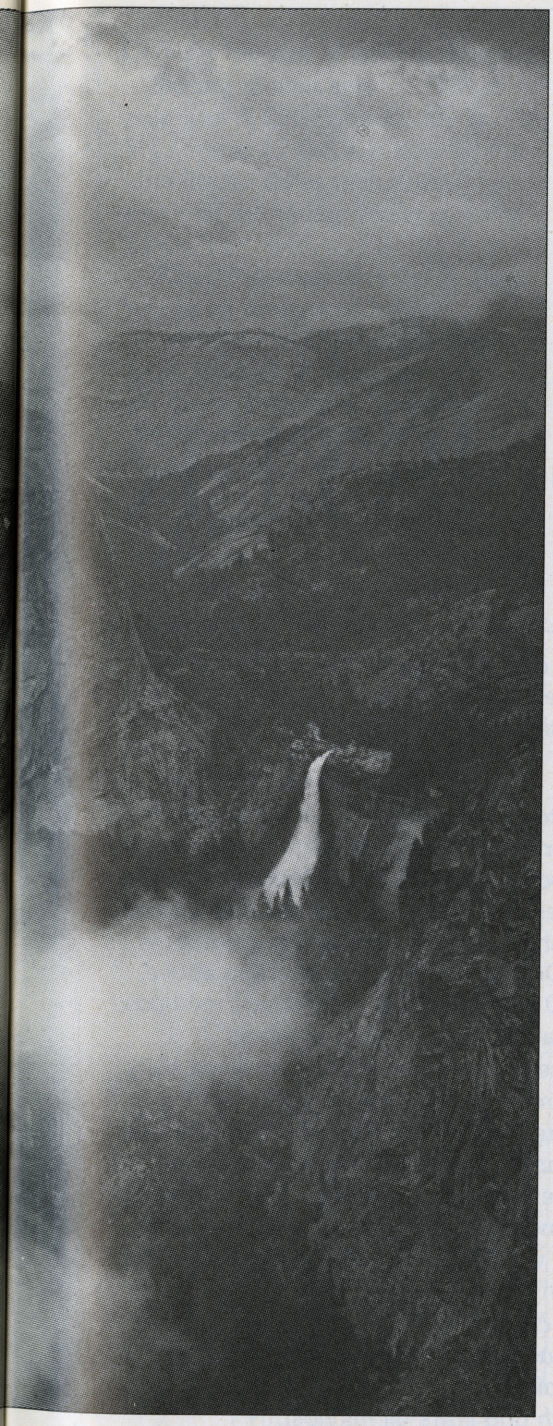
even if they are not immediately apparent in their choices of subject matter. A recent article in *Outdoor Photographer* examined the steps Adams took in reaching the final shot that became the famous photograph "Frozen Lakes and Cliffs," and the five intermediate photographic variants. Stories abound of how Adams would run out of film before his planned field trips were half over, shooting multiple perspectives of his subjects, covering them in every aspect, and returning to the darkroom to discover which images would endure.

Nixon's style is, in comparison, almost spiritual. On his first hike up the Lyell Fork in 1985, he took only 17 photographs in a week; some photographers use a motor drive to shoot that many in three seconds.

Some days he trudges off all day with his 4x5 camera and returns home without having opened the shutter. He finds his shot in the field, or lets it find him; the darkroom is where the image is mined for its most powerful expression.

His efforts seem, finally, to be paying off. Not only are his prints in increasing demand, but he has expanded his workshops to a full range of locations, from Death Valley and the Big Sur Coastline to rafting down the Salmon River in Idaho with the Salmon River Outfitters.

That is where I met Jeff Nixon, in the field. That is where his skills and commitment to his craft are most in



flower. He rises early, leads long hikes into side canyons in search of photo opportunities. ("He climbs like a goat," one trip participant told me, half in admiration and half in bone-weary frustration.) and is *always* open to questions.

Jeff Nixon, the apprentice and journeyman has become the teacher: one who demonstrates, one who guides, one who shares his knowledge and love of outdoor photography with the next generation of visionaries.

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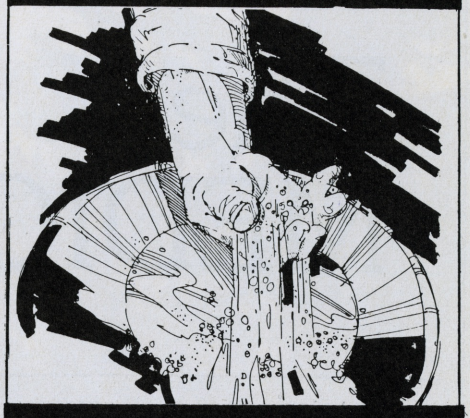

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The MEDICINE MONSTER

by Alan White

Little Yellow Bird fingered his bow string and watched the browsing buck come closer, into the wind. The young man stood in the shadow of the Ponderosa pine with his uncle, Growling Badger, of average height for a Mono man (shorter than Little Yellow Bird), who had Strong Medicine for game and other things of the Earth.

The tribe's best hunter slowly, very slowly, started to draw the powerful bow, backed by the sinew that was a Mono specialty both for hunting and trade. At the critical moment, Growling Badger did an unheard-of thing. He stopped the hunt. His hand placed gently on Yellow Bird's shoulder, he whispered to his nephew, "From the Earth I am receiving the most powerful Medicine I have ever felt. We must flee!"

The Medicine Monster stretched towards the earth's surface. A deep vibration, inaudible at first, shook the ground and everything on it as the Monster rumbled into the range of hearing — at the threshhold of primeval fear. The ground started to crack near where the deer stood. The hunters and the hunted, brothers in terror, tried to scramble away but were shaken to the ground.

The deer, rising quickly to its feet, was hit by a falling tree and did not rise again. The men staggering and rolling, tried to run, crawling and scrambling to distance the Monster. Overlapping thunder-claps of steam, escaping at supersonic speed from the cracks in the earth's surface, pushed them to even greater efforts. Nature's mortars found the range as steam-ejected rocks began to fall — behind, beyond, and to either side of them — in a fusillade threatening all nearby living things.

They were running now, without falling, many hundreds of yards from the vents and cracks. The steam, turning to air, was venting at extreme velocites, blowing out great amounts of tephra, including ash, along with blocks of magma and older granite. Suddenly Old Badger was hit by one of the projectiles, knocked to the ground with a broken back. "Go and help the people flee!" he cried out as the young hunter disappeared from sight into the fall of ash.

Before we try to understand what was going on that day in the northwestern corner of the old Long Valley caldera, it would be helpful to talk about the time in which it happened. By carbon dating wood remnants, it has been established that the time of the eruption in the volcanic Inyo Domes Chain in the scenario above, occurred about 600 years ago. All radio-dating methods, including carbon dating, have a "plus or minus" uncertainty. For the Inyo chain it is plus or minus sixty years, very good precision for such dating.

Since this occurred before the time of Columbus, we might look for a parallel European event to put this event in a timely perspective. Borrowing from the small bank of poetic license, but still within the 60 year limit on the "plus" side, we could assume the year 1415, and borrow words from William the Immortal:

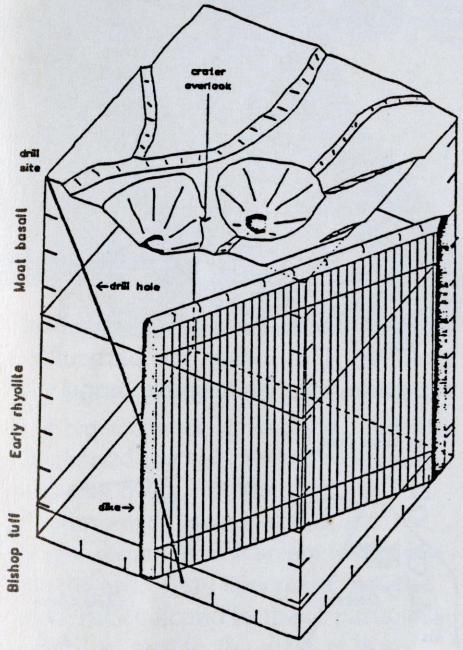
". . . The royal captain of this ruined band
Walking from watch to watch, from tent to tent,
Let him cry, 'Praise and glory on his head!'
For he goes forth and visits all his host,
Bids them good morrow with a modest smile,
Calls them, brothers, friends, and countrymen.
. . . A little touch of Harry in the night
. . . The name of Agincourt."

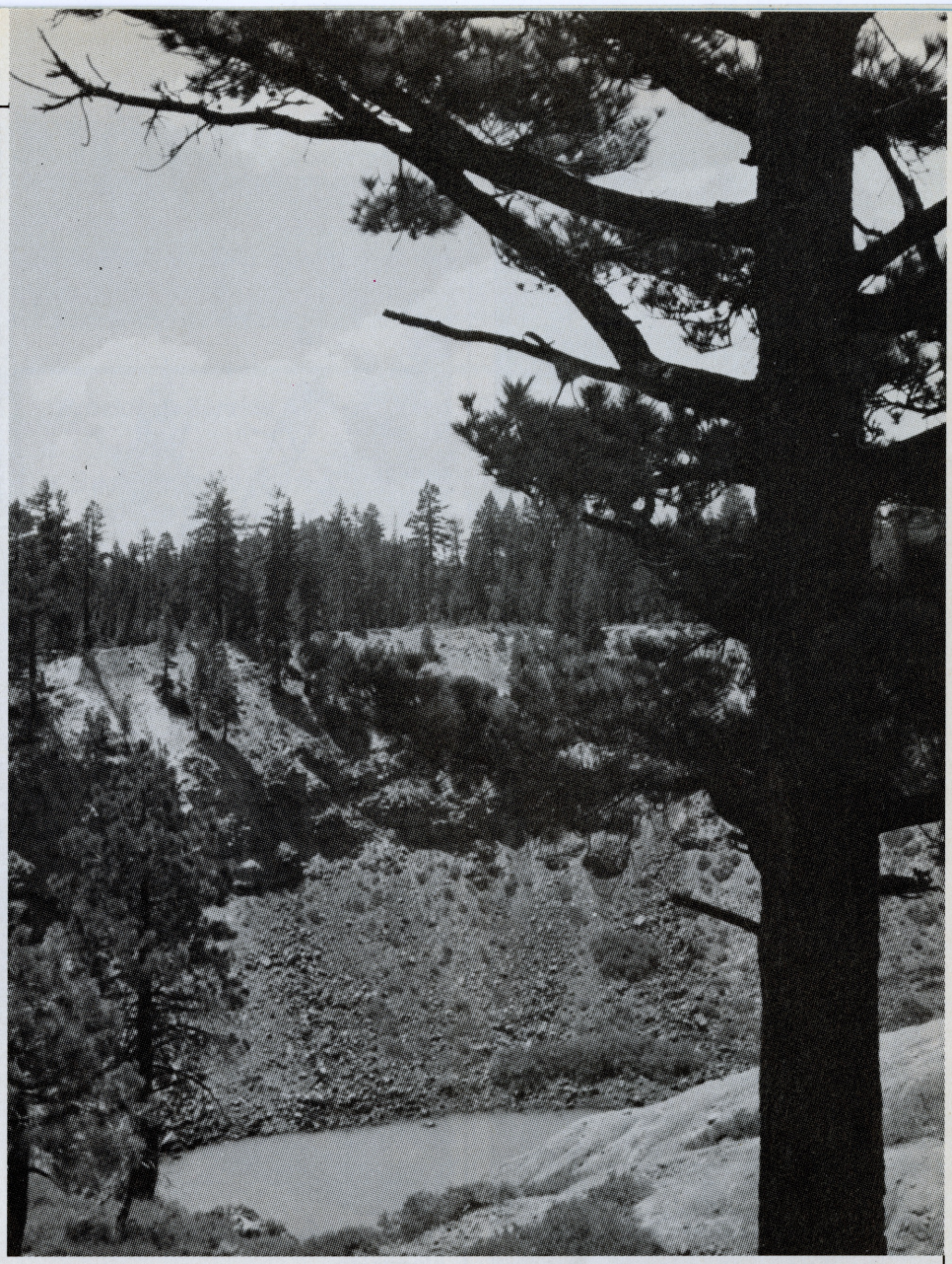
So there we have it. Henry V, in France with his English army the night before the great victory at Agincourt, which saw the French royal armor fall to the powerful English longbows. Longbows coincident in time with the sinew-backed bows of the Monos, also great in power. The historical coincidence might not be precise, but I like to think that the Inyo Dome Chain eruption could have been underway at the exact time of Agincourt.

Drilling for the Medicine Monster

During the summer of 1987, a hole was drilled beneath the South Inyo crater to find and sample the long feeder dikes that caused this eruption in the late 1300s or early 1400s.

When I learned that the drilling had been sponsored by the Department of Energy, I thought, Aha! They are looking for geothermal sources. I imagined that the Department must mostly be involved with bombs and reactors, no doubt supplying some seed money here and there for other energy sources such as geothermal, wind power, and the like. What a pleasant surprise, then, to learn that this exploration was for the sake of science, primarily for geology. Other items on their agenda included volcanic and seismic safety, as well as, perhaps, gaining some knowledge about intrusive rock structures that could help in the search elsewhere for geothermal and metallic resources.





South Inyo Crater, site of 1987 drilling.

This drilling, and earlier drillings in 1983 and 1984 of the Obsidain Dome at the north end of the Inyo Dome Chain, are a United States contribution to a program of paralley research being conducted by several countries in an effort to learn more about the earth. Our contribution, under the umbrella title of the Continental Scientific Drilling Program, includes projects funded through the National Science Foundation, the U.S. Geological Survey, and the Office of Basic Energy Sciences of the Department of Energy. Other countries operating similar drilling programs include the Soviet Union, Sweden and West Germany.

Sandia National Laboratories, a major contractor for the Department of Energy, oversees the operation, management, and evaluation of the Inyo Domes drilling projects. Although, for safety reasons, casual visitors cannot by accommodated at the drill site and the staff member's time is at a premium, I was able to visit the site and found the Sandia people, including Dr. John Eichelberger (principal scientist for the project) to be very helpful. His proposal for this drilling was the result of the earlier, more elaborate drilling project at Obsidian Dome.

At Obsidian Dome, there were three holes drilled. One was sunk deep into the conduit, bringing up lava from the deep magma chamber. The exploration showed that the chamber fed into a funnel-shaped vent filled with porous materials such as pumice which allowed the

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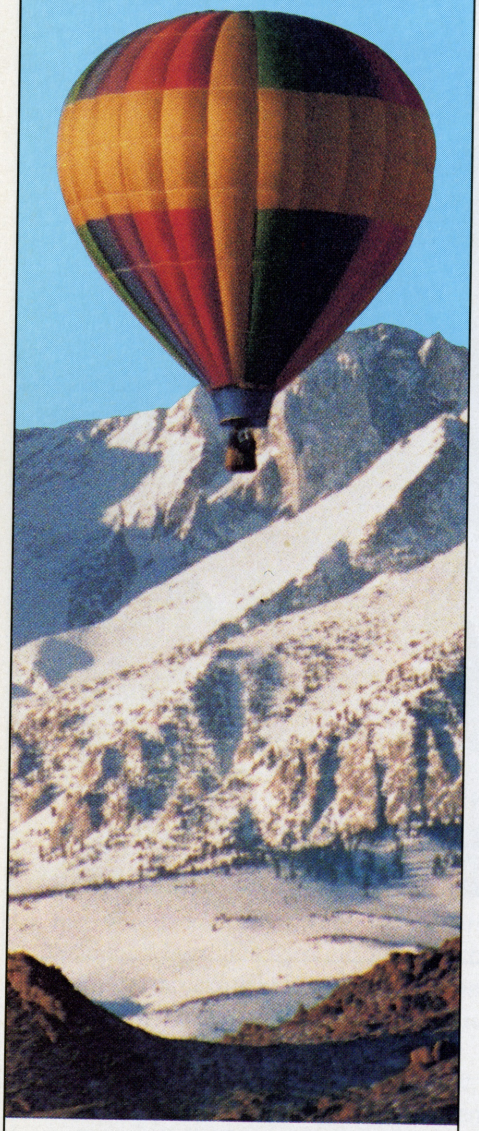

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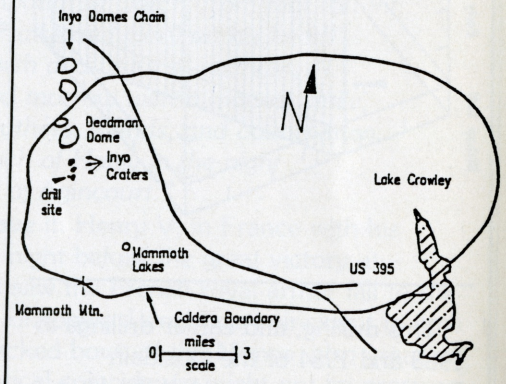
lava to foam and de-gas, relieving pressure so it could *flow* out rather than *blow* out. Because the lava cooled and was not blown apart, it formed glassy obsidian (or pumice, if it retained trapped air).

A second hole was drilled along the edge, where the flow was thin, and the third about one kilometer south of the dome, confirming the assumption of the presence of a flat vertical feeder dike, several miles long. It was a desire for further information about this feeder dike that led to the drill hole under South Inyo Crater.

Other than St. Helens and Lassen, it is perhaps the youngest volcanic formation in the lower 48 states, and has thus not been subject to much alteration in its mineral and chemical make-up. This makes this particular formation ideal as a simple model



from the standpoint of finding and understanding the feeder plumbing.

If you walked the nature trail to the South Inyo Crater overlook

during June or July of last year, you may have heard and seen the drill in operation. Although it was not very obvious at a distance of about 1,000 feet from the trail, these wire-line drills are marvels of complexity and function. The drillers can pull out the core barrel with its rock core without pulling up the drill rod, thus saving hours of drilling time. The hole was drilled at an angle about 30 degrees from the vertical, intended to hit the feeder dike at about 2,000 feet under the crater. After boring through young basalt and then older light-colored rhyolite, the hole should be in or near the Bishop Tuff layer which came from the gigantic Long Valley Caldera volcano.

That world-class volcano traces to a magma chamber six miles deep. The volcano's source is apparently still there: it is merely taking a "nap." With a bit of luck, it may rest for a few thousand years longer. In

Samples brought to the surface.

the last fitful stirring from its sleep, the big chamber (or a close relative) awakened partially to probe upward with the Medicine Monster.

Some geologists feel that the active region of vulcanism is moving northward. They speculate that the next BIG volcano in these parts will occur at, and to the west of, the Mono craters. Whether the time frame is half a century or half a million years is, at this point, simply a matter of guesswork.

L. Allan White is a geophysicist who has worked on such intriguing projects as Paleomagnetic measurements and controlled fusion. His real love is prospecting and interpreting the new earth sciences.

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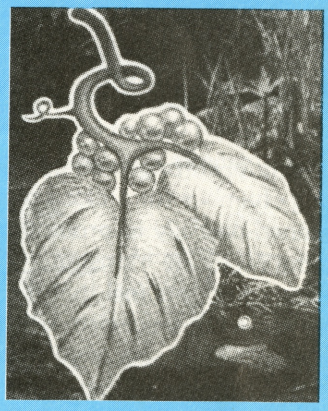

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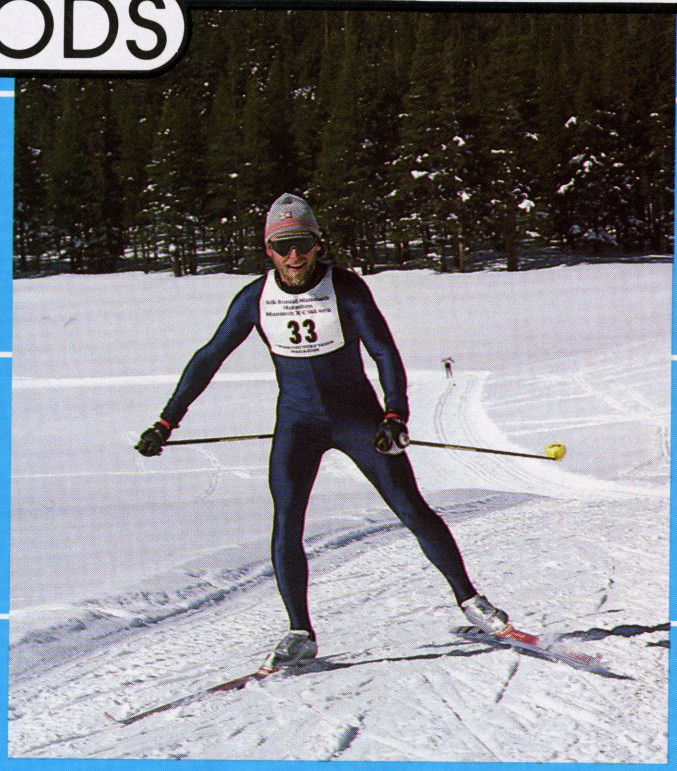

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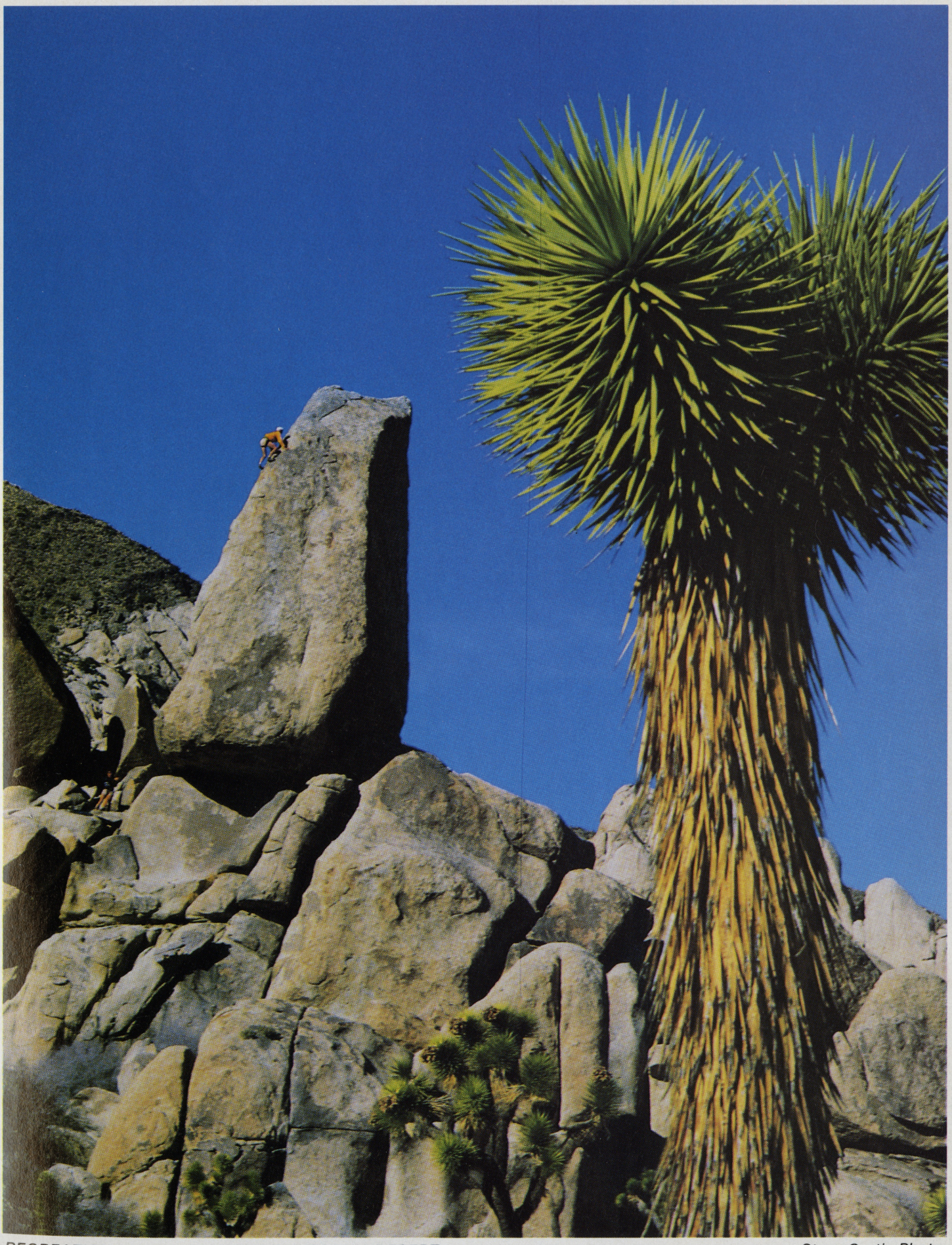

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